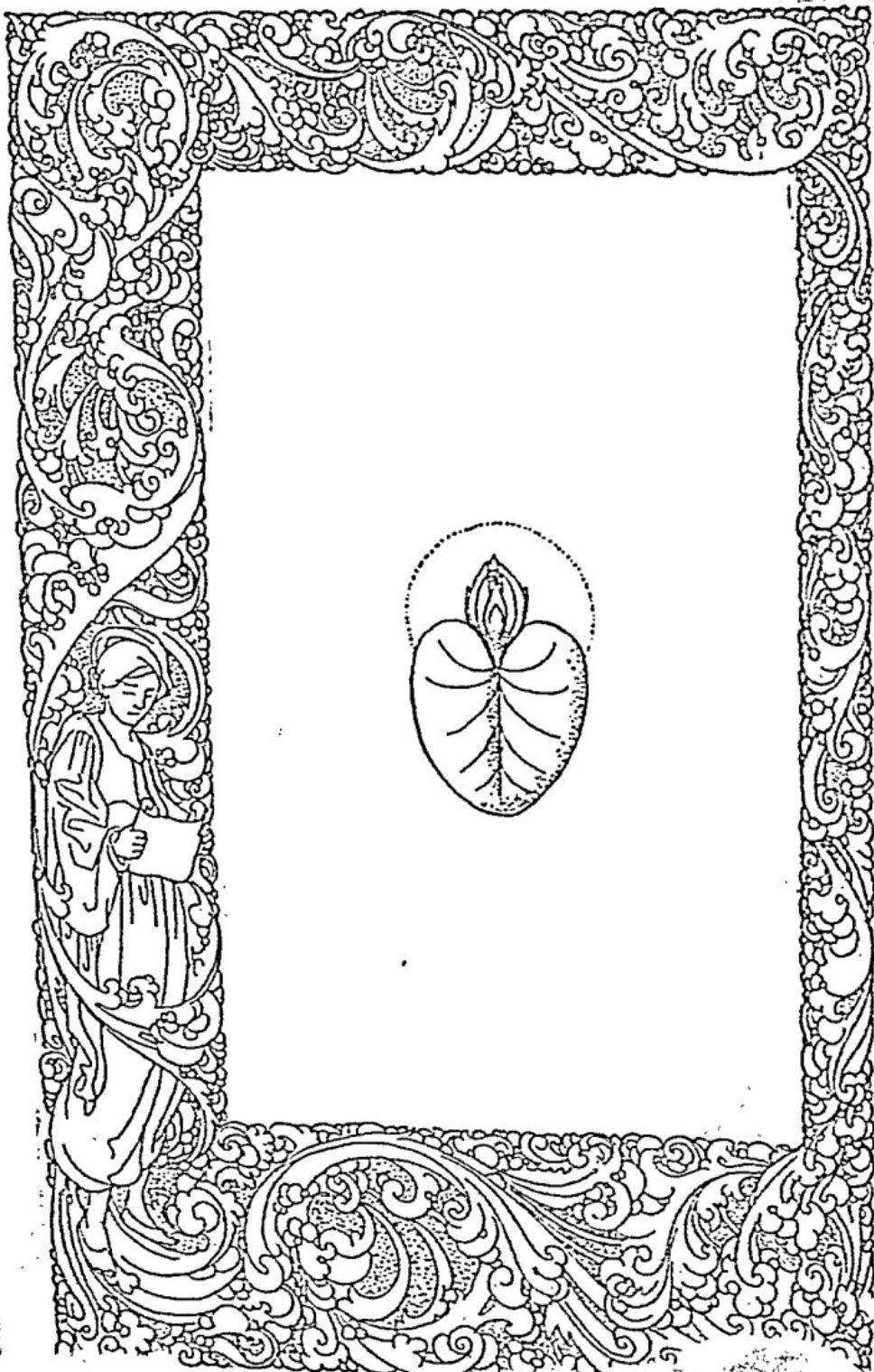


**A MODERN MAN'S
CONFESSiON**

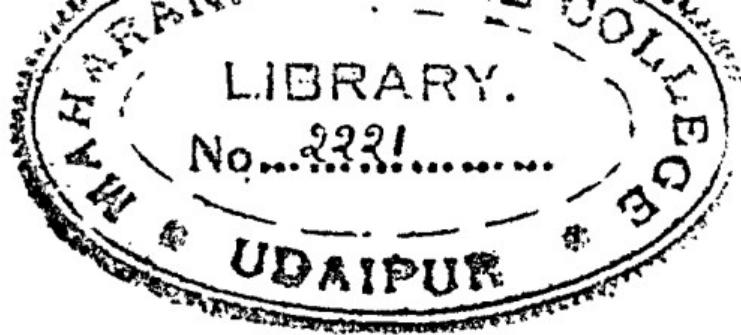


A
*MODERN MAN'S
CONFESSION*

by ALFRED DE MUSSET
TRANSLATED BY
G.F. Monkshood

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PREFACE

ALFRED DE MUSSET was born in Paris in 1810. His spirit lives there still and his books have entered into the kingdom of man's memory with other lords of the ghostland. Two things are said and remembered of his earliest days: his question to his mother, "Irons—nous encore Dimanche prochain, voir la comédie de la messe?" and his falling in love with Cousin Clélie when at the age of four. This seems to be a quaint start in life for the man who was to write the great, temperate appeal to God, *ESPOIR EN DIEU*. A journalist of insight appears to have warned Paul de Musset—loyal brother of Alfred—that his brother was, past a doubt, doomed to fame, yet he feared for him the Delilahs. When the poet cast himself before the feet of France, "baring his heart

that all who passed might see," the Delilahs had done with him and passed also. They left him little more than an empire of the emotions, but it was better than leaving him tied in a sty of the senses. While he was finding the stuff that he spun into silk in *A Modern Man's Confession* we are told that his body and brain were amazingly active. That which for many would have been excess, for him was simply exercise. The so-called love affair with the woman who published under the name of "George Sand" is quite astounding on its literary side. The woman issued about fifty dull books and the man would have cut his throat rather than have written one dull column. But Swinburne's essay upon the poet and the latter's own book will give all that is needed upon this amour. Brilliant Prince *Phosphore de Cœur Volant!* You desired, I am sure, and certainly deserved a finer fate than to be sentenced to success with "George Sand." This man of all men who said once

apropos of that kitchen fiction women turn out, "Don't you see that this chamber-maid's literature will bring out of the earth a new world of ignorant and semi-barbarous readers?" Like all men who love good literature and follow the willis or will o' th' wisp of good writing Alfred de Musset lived many sad years. His brother even speaks of consolations unworthy of the poet. They were brandy and philogyny. In a certain supreme sonnet (well worthy of De Musset himself) Edgar Saltus just touches upon this matter. Some one said to Charpentier the publisher: "Poor Alfred! He is a charming fellow and delightful in society; but, between you and me, he never has written and never will write a line of poetry." This was not meant to be excellent fooling worthy of Touchstone, of Chispa. It was said seriously. It was said of a writer who possessed lines like this:

When Venus from the bitter billows sprung,
From her long locks the sea's salt tear-drops wrung
And, Virgin yet, the world could fertilise.

Or:

When the world worshipped what it kills to-day,
When with four thousand gods no faith was dim.

There are wholly lovely lines in the Letter To Lamartine and To Malibran, but the greatest poem Alfred de Musset wrote was *Hope in God*. This poem and his poems *The Nights* would have brought him fame had all else failed. Of his tragedies *Lorenzaccio* is the best, and those who saw Bernhardt in it have at least one deathless picture to think of for ever, should their eyesight fail. Indeed it is little short of the amazing that the same man who wrote the light love passages in the novel that here follows did actually also write this great *Lorenzaccio* tragedy. What a leap to take! It is as though one left a cabinet particulier supper to officiate at a coronation. However, the tragedies are not read very much. Certainly, and wisely, not so much as his comedies. As to prose, De Musset's longest and most entrancing novel is without doubt *La Confession d'un*

Enfant du Siècle, which is now translated for the *Lotus Library* and entitled, *A Modern Man's Confession*. Of this love story of Octave and Brigitte I do not intend to say much; the whole of it is before you. But I would like to conclude by a wish that the Desgenais of the story had been made into a separate study. He stains the story as he would stain a woman's purity.

G. F. MONKSHOOD.

LONDON.

BQOK I

A MODERN MAN'S CONFESSION

CHAPTER I

To write the history of his life, a man must first have lived; that is why I am writing mine.

I am narrating what happened to me during three years after I was attacked, though still young, by an abominable moral disorder. If I were the only sufferer from it I should say nothing about it; but as I have many fellow-sufferers I am writing for their benefit, although I am uncertain whether they will pay attention to me; but if no one takes warning I shall still have the satisfaction from my words of a better cure for myself, and, like the fox caught in the snare, I shall have bitten off the captive member.

CHAPTER II

DURING the Franco-German war, while husbands and brothers were in Germany, anxious mothers brought into the world a pale, nervous and

4 A Modern Man's Confession

spirited generation. Conceived as they were between two battles, educated in military colleges to the sound of the drum, thousands of children gazed fiercely at themselves as they tested their tiny muscles. From time to time their fathers returned from the slaughter, lifted them up to their chests covered with medals, and then put them down and rode away.

Only one man was then alive in Europe; the other beings tried to fill their lungs with the air he had breathed. Each year France presented to this man three hundred thousand young lives; it was the tribute paid to Cæsar, and without the host behind him he could not follow his fortune. This was the escort he needed to traverse the world, and to reach a little valley upon a desert island beneath a weeping willow.

Never were there so many sleepless nights as in those times; never were there to be seen leaning over city walls so many grief-stricken mothers; never was there such a hush upon the crowds who talked of death. Yet never was there so much joy and life and so many trumpet-calls in the hearts of all. Never was the sun so powerful as in those days, when it dried up all this blood. People said that the sun was made for this man, and called it his sun of Austerlitz. But he made his sun himself with his thundering cannon, and made it cloudless, except after his battles.

It was the air from the cloudless sky, in which so much glory shone, so much steel glittered, that the children breathed. They knew that they were destined for the shambles; but they believed Murat to be invulnerable, and had seen the Emperor cross a bridge over which whistled so much shot that he appeared to be immortal. Even if death came, what was it? Death itself was so beautiful then,

so grand and magnificent in its smoking purple ! It was so much like hope, it mowed down such green ears that it appeared to have become youthful, and people no longer seemed to believe in old age. Every cradle in France was a shield, and so was every coffin ; there were no more old men, there were only corpses or demi-gods.

But the immortal Emperor was one day upon a hill watching seven nations struggle ; while he did not yet know if he would be the master of the whole world or only half of it, Azrael passed that way, touched him with the end of his wing and pushed him into the ocean. At the noise of his fall the moribund powers rose from their sick beds and put forward their crooked limbs, all the royal spiders divided Europe, and out of the Imperial Purple fashioned a Harlequin's dress.

In the same way that a traveller on a journey hastens night and day, through rain and sunshine, without noticing danger or fatigue ; but as soon as he reaches home and sits down before the fire he experiences a tremendous weariness, and can hardly drag himself to bed : so France, the widow of a Cæsar, suddenly felt her wounds. A weakness overtook her, and she fell into such a profound slumber, that her old kings, believing her dead, wrapped her in a white shroud. The old grey-headed troops returned exhausted with fatigue, and fires were sadly relit upon the hearths of the deserted mansions.

Then these men belonging to the Empire, who had gone through so much, kissed their pale and wasted wives and spoke of their first love ; they gazed at themselves in the streams of the land of their birth, and they saw that they themselves were so mutilated that they remembered they had sons, in order to close their eyes to their own shortcomings. They asked where their sons were ; the

6 A Modern Man's Confession

children left their colleges, and seeing no more sabres, cuirasses, or cavaliers, they in their turn asked about their fathers. Their reply was, that the war was over, that Cæsar was dead, and that the portraits of Wellington and Blücher were hung in the antechambers of consulates and embassies, with this inscription under them : "To the Saviours of the World."

Then the young men looked down upon a world in ruins. These children came of the drops of the burning blood which had inundated the earth : they were born to the breast of war for war. They had dreamt for fifteen years of the snows of Moscow and the sun of the Pyramids. They had not left their native towns ; but they had been told that from each gate of these towns was the road to a European capital. They had the world in their heads ; they looked at the earth, sky, the roads and streets ; they were all empty, and the bells of their churches sounded far away.

Pale phantoms clad in black robes slowly traversed the country ; others knocked at the doors of houses—when the doors were opened, drew from their pockets well-worn deeds with which they drove out the occupants. From every direction came men still trembling with the fear which had seized them on their departure twenty years before. They all argued, shouted and disputed ; it was astonishing that a single death could call together so many ravens.

The King of France was upon his throne, looking everywhere to try and find a bee in his tapestry. Some held out their hats to him and he gave them money ; others showed him a crucifix and he kissed it ; others were content to shout great and famous names into his ears, and he told them to go into his great hall, where the echoes were sonorous ; others showed him their old cloaks, as if they had

driven away the bees with them, and he gave them new ones.

The children saw these things, and still thought the shade of Cæsar would disembark at Cannes and breathe upon these larvæ; but still the silence was unbroken, and nothing appeared in the sky except the pallor of the lilies. When the children spoke of glory they were told : " Become priests "; when they spoke of ambition : " Become priests "; when they spoke of hope, love, strength, or life, the answer was the same.

But a man mounted to the tribune, holding in his hand a contract between the King and the people; he began to point out that glory was a beautiful thing, and so was warlike ambition, but that there was a finer thing still called liberty.

The children lifted up their heads and remembered that their grandparents had spoken of it. They recollect ed that they had come across, in dark corners of their old homes, Latin inscriptions on mysterious marble busts of long-haired people; they remembered that in the evenings they had seen their grandparents shake their heads and speak of a river of blood even more terrible than that of the Emperor. In this word liberty there was something which made their hearts beat as if it were a dim recollection, or even a more shadowy hope.

They trembled as they listened; but on their way home they met three baskets on the road to Clamart: they contained three young men who had spoken this word liberty too loudly.

A strange smile flitted across their faces at the sorrowful sight; but other speakers, mounting the tribune, began to publicly calculate the cost of ambition, and to prove that glory was very dear; they showed the horrors of war and its shambles. They spoke so long, and said so much, that around

6 A Modern Man's Confession

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8 A Modern Man's Confession

them, like the leaves in autumn, fell every human illusion, and those who listened passed their hands across their foreheads, like people awakening from a fever.

Some said : " The cause of the Emperor's fall is the fact that the people no longer desire him "; others said : " People desired the King ; no, liberty ; no, reason ; no, religion ; no, the English constitution ; no, an absolute monarchy " ;—and one added : " No, not one of these things, but rest."

The life which presented itself to these young fellows was divided by three elements : behind them a past for ever destroyed, but with the still smouldering ruins of centuries of absolutism ; before them the dawn of an immense horizon, the daybreak of the future ; and between these two worlds something like the ocean which separates the old continent from the new America, something vague and floating, a rough sea full of wrecks, traversed from time to time by some white, far-reaching mist, or by some ship emitting a heavy cloud of smoke, the present century, in a word, which separates the past from the future, which is neither the one nor the other, but resembles both at the same time, and in which one does not know at each step whether one is walking upon a seed about to spring up, or upon a plant just dead.

In this chaos it was necessary, then, to choose ; this was the prospect presented to children full of strength and audacity, sons of the Empire, and grandsons of the Revolution.

Now they no longer desired the past, for there faith could give them nothing ; they loved the future, but in the same way that Pygmalion loved Galatea ; it was to them like a marble love, and they were waiting for it to become animate, for the blood to flow in its veins.

The present, then, remained for them, the spirit of the century, angel of the dawn which is neither night nor day; they found it sitting upon a limebag full of bones, clad in the cloak of the egoists, and shivering with a terrible chill. The anguish of death entered their souls at the sight of this spectre; half mummy, half foetus; they approached as the visitor to Strasburg approaches, when he is shown the daughter of an old Count de Sarrendin embalmed in her wedding attire: this childish skeleton causes a shudder, for its livid hands wear a wedding ring, while its head falls into dust in the midst of orange blossoms.

As at the approach of a storm, a strong wind rushes through the forest, making the trees tremble, and is succeeded by a profound silence; so Napoleon had shaken the world; kings had felt their crowns tremble, and placing their hands to their heads had found nothing but their hair standing on an end with fright. The Pope had travelled three hundred leagues to bless him in the name of God and hand him his diadem; but Napoleon had taken him by the hand. So everything in the mournful forest of Europe had trembled, and then came the silence.

People say that if on meeting a furious dog one has the courage to walk steadily without turning, the dog will follow for a time, growling; but if one makes a gesture of fear, or too quick a movement, it will attack and devour one; for after the first bite there is no escape.

Now in the history of Europe it has often happened that a sovereign has made this gesture of fear, and his people have devoured him; but they have not all done it at the same time, that is to say, a king has disappeared; but not the royal majesty. Before Napoleon, royal majesty had made this fatal gesture, and religion, nobility, and

10 A Modern Man's Confession

all power, human and divine, had made it too.

After the death of Napoleon divine and human powers became re-established, but faith no longer existed in them. The knowledge of what is possible is a terrible danger, for the mind always goes still further. To say : "That could happen," or to say : "That has happened?" is very similar to the first bite of the dog.

Napoleon the despot was the last ray of the lamp of despotism; he destroyed and parodied kings as Voltaire did the holy books. After him was heard a great noise; it was the rock of St. Helena, which had fallen upon the Old World. Immediately there appeared in the heavens the pallid star of reason, and its rays, like those of the cold goddess of the night, shedding light without heat, enveloped the world in a livid shroud.

Before that time people had arisen who hated the nobles, who spoke against the priests, and who conspired against kings; there had even been some who had cried out against abuses and prejudices, but to see people smile was a great novelty. If a nobleman, or a priest, or a sovereign passed, the peasants who had fought began to shake their heads and say : "Ah, we have seen him before now in a different place; he looked very different then."

When people spoke of the throne and the altar they replied : "They are four pieces of wood; we have fastened them together and unfastened them." When they were told : "People, you have seen the error of your ways; you have called your kings and priests," they replied : "It was not us; it was those chatterers there." When they were told : "Forget the past, work and obey," they sat up straight on their seats, and there was a loud noise. It was a rusty and dented sabre which had moved in the chimney corner.

Then followed immediately: "Remain quiet, at least; do not seek to harm any one if you are not yourself injured." Alas, they were not content with that!

But youth was not satisfied. It is certain that in man there are two occult powers which fight to the death: one, cold and farscoring, attaches itself to reality, calculation, consideration, and judges the past; the other thirsts for the future, and launches out into the unknown. When a man is carried away by passion, reason follows him, weeping to warn him of his danger; but as soon as the man is stopped by the voice of reason, he says to himself: "It is true, I am mad; where was I going?" Passion cries to him: "I shall die."

A feeling of inexpressible uneasiness began to spread in the minds of the young. Condemned to rest by the rulers of the world, given up to all kinds of snobbery, to idleness and ennui, the young fellows saw the foaming waves, against which they had prepared themselves, recede. All these gladiators ready for the fray felt in their hearts an overwhelming sadness. The most wealthy became libertines; those of moderate means took up a profession, and resigned themselves to either the Church or the sword; the poorest of them all hurled themselves with chilled enthusiasm into the whirlpool of endless action. As human weakness seeks companionship, and men are by nature gregarious, some took up politics. Some fought the guard upon the staircase of the Legislative Chamber, some rushed to the theatre to see a play in which Talma wore a wig which made him look like Cæsar; others flocked to the funeral of a Liberal deputy. But of the members of the two opposite parties, there was not one who, on returning home, did not

feel the emptiness of his existence and the poverty of his efforts.

At the time that the outdoor life was so colourless and paltry, society's inner life had a dark and silent aspect; a most severe hypocrisy held sway over morals; English ideas became mixed up with devotion, even gaiety had disappeared. Perhaps it was Providence preparing the new path, perhaps the angel forerunner of future society, who was already sowing in women's hearts the seeds of human independence, which some day they would proclaim. But it is certain that suddenly in all the drawing-rooms in Paris the men gathered on one side, and the women on the other, an unprecedented thing; so the women, clad in white like brides, and the men in black like orphans, began to measure each other with their eyes.

Let us not deceive ourselves, this black attire worn by the men of our day is a terrible symbol; to come to it armour fell off piece by piece, and embroidery flower by flower. It is human reason which has overthrown every illusion, the consolation for which is the wearing of the mourning.

The manners of students and artists, so free, beautiful and full of youth, felt this universal change. The men in separating from the women had whispered a word which wounds to the death: contempt. They had taken to wine and courtesans. Students and artists did thus; love was treated as glory, and religion, it was an ancient illusion. They went into disreputable places; the grisette, that dreamy and romantic class, so loving and tender, was left to the shop counters. She was poor, and no one loved her now; she wanted dresses and hats, so she sold herself. The young man who ought to have loved her, whom she would have loved, who sometimes took her to the

woods of Verrières and Romainville, to dance on the turf and sup in the shadow; the young man who came to chat during the long winter evenings by the light of the lamp at the back of the shop, who shared with her his bread earned by the sweat of his brow, and his love, sublime though poor; the same man, after deserting her, found her once more in a lupanar, pale and livid, lost for ever, with hunger on her lips and prostitution in her heart.

Now about this time two poets, the men of the greatest genius in the century after Napoleon, consecrated their lives to collecting all the elements of anguish and grief scattered throughout the universe. Goethe, the patriarch of a new literature, after painting in *Werther* the passion which leads to suicide, had in his *Faust* depicted the most sombre human figure which ever represented evil and misfortune. His works then began to spread from Germany to France. From his study, surrounded by pictures and statues, having wealth, ease and happiness, he watched his works of gloom come to us with a paternal smile. Byron answered him with a cry of anguish which made Greece tremble, and suspended Manfred over the abyss, as if nothingness was the answer of the hideous enigma in which he was enveloped.

Pardon me, great poets, who are now but a few ashes resting in the earth! pardon me, you are demi-gods, and I am but a suffering child. But in writing all this I cannot help cursing you. Why did you not sing of the perfume of the flowers, the voices of nature, hope and love, the vine, the sun, azure and beauty? Doubtless you knew life, and doubtless you suffered; the world crumbled around you, you wept upon its ruins and despaired; your mistresses deceived you, your friends slandered you, and your compatriots despised you; you had

a void in your heart, death in your eyes, and were a Colossus of grief. But tell me, noble Goethe, was there no consoling voice in the holy murmur of your vast German forests? For you, for whom beautiful poesy was the sister of science, could not both of them find in immortal nature a healing plant for the heart of their favourite? Could not you, who was a pantheist, an ancient poet of Greece, a lover of sacred ceremonies, put a little honey in those beautiful vases you knew how to make, since you had only to smile and allow the bees to come to your lips? Had not you, too, Byron, at Ravenna, beneath the orange groves of Italy, and the beautiful skies of Venice, your well beloved? I who speak to you, and am but a feeble child, have perhaps suffered worse ills than you, and yet I believe in hope and bless God.

When English and German ideas entered our heads in this way, they came with sad and silent disgust, followed by a terrible convulsion. But to formulate general ideas is to change saltpetre into gunpowder, and the Homeric brain of the great Goethe had sucked like a still all the liquor from the forbidden fruit. Those who did not read his works were considered ignorant. Poor creatures! the explosion carried them away like grains of dust into the abyss of universal doubt.

It was like a denial of all things in heaven and earth, which might be named disenchantment, or perhaps despair; as if lethargic humanity was considered dead by those who felt its pulse. Just like the soldier of the past, who, when asked, "In what do you believe?" first replied, "Myself"; so did the youth of France reply to the same question by the word, "Nothing."

They then formed themselves into two camps: on the one side the exalted and suffering minds, all the expansive souls needing the infinite, bent

their heads and wept; they wrapped themselves up in unhealthy dreams, and appeared nothing more than frail reeds upon an ocean of bitterness. On the other hand, material men remained upright, inflexible, in the midst of their actual possessions, and took no more care than to count their money. It was only a sob and a burst of laughter, one coming from the soul, the other from the body.

This is what the soul said: "Alas, alas! religion is gone; the clouds of heaven fall in rain; we have no more hope or expectation, only two little bits of black wood, like a cross, before which to outstretch our hands. The star of the future is hardly rising, it cannot rise above the horizon, but remains wrapped in clouds, like a winter sun, with its blood-red disc, which it has retained since '93. There is no more love, no more glory. Upon the earth everything is dark as night, and we shall be dead when the day breaks."

The body said: "Man is here below to make use of his senses; he has in a greater or lesser degree small pieces of a yellow or white metal, with which he has a right to more or less esteem. So to eat, drink and sleep, that is to live. As for the ties which exist between men friendship consists in lending money; but it is rare to have a friend loving enough for that. Love is an exercise of the body, the only intellectual joy is vanity."

Like the Asiatic plague exhaled by the vapours of the Ganges, this frightful despair stalked with giant strides over the earth. Already Chateaubriand, the prince of poesy, wrapping the terrible idol in his pilgrim's cloak, had placed it on a marble altar in the midst of the perfumes of the sacred censers; already full of almost useless strength, the children of the century drank from their cups the poisoned draught. They were all

being swallowed up when the jackals came out of the earth. A cadaverous and poisonous literature, having only a form, and that a hideous one, commenced to sprinkle with fetid blood all the monsters of nature.

Who would dare, then, to tell what took place in the colleges? Men doubted everything; young men denied everything. Poets sang of despair; young men left college with a serene face, a fresh colour, and blasphemy in their mouths. Besides, as the French character, which is always gay and open, still predominated, the heads of the people were easily filled with English and German ideas; but their hearts being too weak to struggle and suffer, withered like broken flowers. Thus the cause of death descended from the head to the entrails, calmly and without a shock. In place of enthusiasm for evil, there was merely self-denial from good, in place of despair, insensibility. Children of fifteen, seated nonchalantly under small trees in flower, carried on as a pastime arguments which would have made the immovable groves of Versailles tremble with horror. The communion of Christ, the Host, that external symbol of heavenly love, was used to seal letters; the children spat out the bread of God.

Happy were those who escaped those days! Happy were those who crossed the abyss with their eyes upon the sky! There were, doubtless, some who did, and we envy them.

It is unhappily true that in blasphemy there is a great waste of strength, which soothes the overflowing heart. When an atheist, pulling out his watch, gave God a quarter of an hour in which to strike him dead, there is no doubt that he procured a quarter of an hour's anger and atrocious enjoyment. It was the paroxysm of despair, a nameless appeal to all the celestial powers; it was

a poor, miserable creature twisting beneath the foot which crushed it; it was a great cry of despair. Who knows? in the eyes of Him who sees everything, perhaps it was a prayer.

Thus the young found employment for their latent strength in affection for despair. To joke about glory, religion and love far and wide is a great consolation to those who only know how to act; they are laughing at themselves, and so putting themselves right by learning the lesson. Then it is soothing to believe one's self unfortunate, when one is only unoccupied and bored. Debauchery, besides, the first conclusion of the beginning of death, is a terrible mill-stone when it is a question of enervation. Therefore the rich said: "There is nothing real but wealth; all the rest is a dream; let us enjoy ourselves." The people of moderate wealth said: "There is nothing real but oblivion; all the rest is a dream; let us forget and die." The poor said: "There is nothing real but misfortune; all the rest is a dream; let us blaspheme and die."

Is this too dark a picture? Is it exaggerated? What do you think of it? Am I a misanthrope? Allow me a reflection.

In reading the history of the fall of the Roman Empire, it is impossible not to perceive the evil that the Christians, who were so admirable in the desert, caused in the state when they had the power. "When I think," says Montesquieu, "of the profound ignorance into which the Greek clergy plunged the laity, I cannot help comparing them with the Scythians of whom Herodotus speaks, who put out the eyes of their slaves, so that nothing could distract their attention while they were churning." No state business, no peace, no war, no truce, no negotiations, no marriage was arranged except by the agency of the

20 A Modern Man's Confession

ills. It is like a man whose house is in ruins; he has demolished it to build another. The material lies about, and he is waiting for the stone for his new house. When he is ready, with his sleeves turned up and his tools in his hand to dress his stone and make his cement, some one tells him that the stone is missing, and advises him to whiten the old and utilize it. What would you have him do, as he does not wish to make a nest for his brood out of the ruins? The quarry is deep, the tackle is too weak to bring up the stones. "Wait," he is told, "we will bring up the stones a few at a time; hope, work, advance, draw back." What do not people advise him? All this time this man, not having his old house, nor yet his new one, does not know how to protect himself from the rain, how to prepare his supper, where to work or rest, where to live or die; and his children are babes.

Now, unless I am greatly mistaken, we are like this man. O people of the centuries to come! when you are on a warm summer's day bending over your plough, with the beautiful green of the country around you; when you see beneath a bright sun the earth, your secund mother, smiling in her morning robe at the toiler, her well-beloved son; when, wiping from your tranquil brow the holy baptism of sweat, you cast your eyes over the immense horizon, where there is no ear taller than the other in the human crop, but only corn-flowers and marguerites in the midst of the yellow wheat; O free men! when you thank God that you are born for this harvest, think of us who are no more; tell yourself that we dearly pursued the repose you now enjoy; pity us more than all your ancestors; for we have suffered many ills, making us worthy of pity, and we have lost our consolation.

CHAPTER III

I MUST tell of the time when I was first seized with the malady of the century.

I was at table at a great supper after a masquerade. Around me were my friends, richly clad; on all sides were young men and women, sparkling in their beauty and gaiety; right and left were exquisite meats, flagons, lustres, flowers; above my head was a noisy orchestra, and opposite me sat my mistress, a superb creature, whom I idolized.

I was then nineteen; I had experienced neither illness nor misfortune; I had a noble and straightforward character, with all the aspirations of an overflowing heart. The fumes of the wine had entered into the blood in my veins. It was one of those moments of intoxication, when everything one sees or hears speaks to one of the well-beloved. The whole of nature appears like a precious stone with a thousand facets, upon each one of which the mysterious name is engraved. I could readily have embraced all those I saw smile, as I felt like a brother to the whole world. My mistress had made an appointment with me for that evening, and as I slowly raised my glass to my lips I looked at her.

As I turned to take a plate my fork fell. I leant down to pick it up, and, as I could not at first find it, I lifted up the table-cloth to see where it had rolled. I saw under the table my mistress's foot resting upon that of the young man at her side; their legs were crossed and entwined, and from time to time they gently squeezed one another.

I sat up perfectly calmly, asked for another

18 A Modern Man's Confession

monks. It is almost impossible to appreciate to the full the evil consequences of this.

Montesquieu might have added: Christianity was the ruin of emperors, but the saviour of the people. It opened to the barbarians the palaces of Constantinople, but it opened the cottage doors to the consoling angels of Christ. It was a question of the great of the earth! and it is interesting as the death-rattle of an empire corrupt to the very marrow of its bones, as the sombre galvanism by means of which the skeleton of tyranny upon the tombs of Heliogabalus and Caracalla still exerted its influence. A fine thing to preserve was the mummy of Rome embalmed with the perfumes of Nero, shrouded in the winding-sheet of Tiberius! It was a question, politicians, of finding the poor and telling them to be at peace; it was a question of allowing moles and worms to cover the monuments of shame, but also to draw from the flanks of the mummy a virgin as beautiful as the mother of the Redeemer—hope, friend of the oppressed.

This was the result of Christianity; and now, since so many years, what have those done who destroyed it? They have seen that the poor allowed themselves to be oppressed by the rich, the weak by the strong, because they said: "The rich and the strong will oppress me on earth, but when they wish to enter Paradise, I shall be at the gate and will accuse them before the tribunal of God." So, alas! they possessed their souls in patience.

The antagonists of the Christ then said to the poor: "You have patience till the day of justice, there is no justice; you wait for eternal life to obtain your revenge, there is no eternal life; you collect your tears and those of your family, the cries of your children and the sobs of your wife,

in order to lay them at the feet of God at the hour of your death; there is no God."

Then it is certain the poor man dried his tears, told his wife to be silent, and his children to come with him, and stood up straight with the strength of a bull. He said to the rich: " You who oppress me are only a man "; to the priest: " You, who have consoled me, you have lied." That was just what the antagonists of the Christ desired. Perhaps they thought thus to bring about the happiness of men by sending the poor man to the conquest of liberty.

But if the poor man, having once understood that the priest deceived him, that the rich robbed him, that all men had the same rights, that all goods were of this world, and that his misery was ungodly; if the poor man, believing in himself and his two arms as his only faith, said to himself one fine day: " I will make war on the rich ! I will have enjoyment here below, since there is none elsewhere ! The earth is mine, since heaven is empty ; it belongs to me and every one else, since all are equal !" O sublime orators, who brought him to this, what will you say to him if he is overcome ?

Without a doubt, you are philanthropists ; without a doubt, you are right as regards the future, and the day will come when you will be blessed ; but the time when we can bless you is not yet. When, in the past, the oppressor said, " The earth is mine," the oppressed could reply, " Heaven is for me !" In these days what reply could they give ?

The malady of the present century arises from two causes : the people who have passed through the events of '93 and 1814 have wounds in their hearts. Everything that used to be has gone, and the things that will be have not yet come to pass. It is useless to look elsewhere for the root of our

fork, and continued my supper. My mistress and her neighbour, too, were very calm, hardly speaking, and not looking at one another. The young man had his elbows on the table, and was joking with another woman, who showed him her necklace and bracelets. My mistress was motionless, with a fixed gaze full of languor. I watched them both during the rest of the supper, and I saw nothing either in their gestures or looks which could betray them. Finally, during dessert, I dropped my serviette, and stooped down again, to find them in the same position, tightly pressed together.

I had promised to see my mistress home that evening. She was a widow, and, consequently, without restriction, as she had an old relative who accompanied her and acted as chaperone. As I crossed the hall she called me: "Come, Octave, shall we go? I am ready." I began to laugh, and went out without replying. After walking a little way I sat down upon a stone. I hardly know what I thought; I was almost stunned and driven mad by the infidelity of this woman, of whom I had never been jealous, or even suspicious. What I had seen left no room for doubt; I was stunned as if by a club, and I cannot recall what passed through my mind while I was sitting there, except that, looking mechanically at the sky, I saw a shooting star, and gravely took off my hat and saluted the fugitive gleam of light, in which poets see the destruction of a world.

I quietly returned home, neither feeling nor understanding anything, as if I were deprived of thought. I undressed and went to bed; but hardly had I laid my head upon my pillow, than the thoughts of vengeance seized me with such force that I suddenly rose straight up against the wall, as if all the muscles of my body had become wood.

I got out of bed, crying with outstretched arms, only able to walk upon my heels, so contracted were the nerves of my toes. I spent nearly an hour thus, completely mad, and rigid as a skeleton. It was the first access of rage I ever experienced.

The man whom I had surprised with my mistress was one of my most intimate friends. I called upon him on the following day, accompanied by a young lawyer named Desgenais; we took pistols, and another witness, and went to the wood of Vincennes. All the way I carefully avoided speaking to or approaching my adversary, and in this way prevented myself from striking or insulting him, violence of this kind being always hideous and useless as long as the law tolerates properly arranged duels. I could not help fixing my eyes upon him. He was a friend of my youth, and for many years we had done everything possible for one another. He was well acquainted with my love for my mistress, and had several times given me clearly to understand that these kinds of unions were sacred among friends, and that he would be incapable of trying to supplant me, even were he to love the same woman. Thus I had every confidence in him, and I had perhaps never clasped the hand of a human creature more cordially than his.

I looked curiously at this man, whom I had heard speak of friendship like a hero of antiquity, and seen caressing my mistress; I looked him up and down, with haggard eyes, to see how he was made. The man whom I had known from the age of ten, with whom I had lived day by day in the most intimate and perfect friendship, seemed to me to be some one whom I had never seen. I will make use of a comparison.

There is a well-known Spanish play, in which

a stone statue, sent by heavenly justice, comes to sup with a rake. The rake puts the best possible face upon the matter, and tries to appear indifferent; but the statue asks for his hand, and the man, after giving it, feels a mortal chill seize him, and falls down in convulsions.

Now, during my life, every time I have felt entire confidence either in a friend or a mistress, and have discovered suddenly that I was being deceived, the effect the discovery produced upon me I can only compare to the hand-clasp of the statue. Truly it is the impression of real marble in all its mortal chill, a freezing kiss; it is the touch of a stone man; alas, the terrible guest has knocked more than once at my door; more than once we have supped together.

After the preliminaries, my adversary and myself took up our positions, and advanced slowly towards one another. He fired first, and wounded me in the right arm. I immediately changed my pistol to the other hand, but had not strength enough to raise it, and I fell upon my knees.

Then I saw my enemy advance hurriedly, with a very agitated look and a pale face. My seconds ran to me at the same time, seeing that I was wounded; he waved them aside and took my wounded hand. He clenched his teeth and could hardly speak; I saw his agony. He suffered the most frightful agony a man could suffer.

"Go away!" I cried to him; "go and dry yourself upon the sheets of ——!" He choked and so did I.

I was put into a carriage, in which was a doctor. The wound was not a dangerous one, as the bullet had not touched any bones; but I was in such a state of excitement that it was impossible at once to dress it. Just as the carriage started I saw a trembling hand at the door; it

was my opponent, who had come back. I shook my head as his only reply; I was in such a rage that it would have been in vain for me to make an effort to pardon him, though believing his repentance to be sincere.

On reaching home the blood, which was flowing freely from my arm, relieved me very much; for the weakness delivered me from the anger, which was doing me more harm than my wound. I gladly went to bed, and I don't think I ever drank anything more agreeable than the first glass of water which was given to me.

After going to bed fever took hold of me. Then I began to shed tears. I could conceive that my mistress had ceased to love me, but I could not conceive that she had deceived me. I did not understand the reason why a woman, who was forced neither by duty nor interest, could lie to one man when she loved another. I asked twenty times a day: "Desgenais, how was it possible? If I were her husband, or paid her, I could understand her deceiving me; but why, if she no longer loved me, did she not tell me so? why did she deceive me?" I did not understand that one could lie with regard to love; I was still a child, and I must admit that I am still unable to understand it. Every time I have fallen in love with a woman, I have told her so, and every time I have ceased to love a woman I have told her so, too, with the same sincerity, having always thought, in those kinds of things, one can do nothing of one's own accord, and that lying is the only crime.

Desgenais replied to everything I said: "She is a wretch; promise me to see her no more." I swore solemnly to him. He also advised me not to write to her even to reproach her, and, if she wrote to me, not to reply. I promised him all

26 A Modern Man's Confession

that, astonished at his asking me, and almost indignant that he could doubt me.

But the first thing I did when I got up and left my room was to go and see my mistress. I found her alone, sitting upon a chair in the corner of her chamber, with downcast face and in great disorder. I overwhelmed her with the most violent reproaches; I was intoxicated with despair. I shouted loudly enough for every one in the house to hear, and sometimes my tears so violently interrupted my words that I fell upon the bed to give them full play.

"Ah, faithless one! wretched woman!" I said, through my tears; "you know that I shall die, and that will give you pleasure. What have I done?"

She clasped me round the neck, told me she had been seduced, led away; that my rival had made her intoxicated at the fatal supper, but that she had never been his; that she had abandoned herself in a moment of forgetfulness, and had committed a fault, but not a crime; that she realized all the evil she had done, but if I would pardon her she would die too. She exhausted all the tears of a sincere repentance and the eloquence of grief in consoling me; I had never seen her as beautiful as she was when she knelt in the middle of the room, pale and haggard, her dress undone, and her hair scattered over her shoulders. I trembled with horror as all my senses were aroused by this sight.

I went out, exhausted, hardly able to see or walk. I desired never to see her again, but in a quarter of an hour I went back. I know not what desperate power urged me; I had a strong desire to possess her once more, to drink upon her magnificent body those bitter tears, and afterwards to kill both of us. I abhorred her and idolized her;

I felt that her love was my loss, but that to live without her was impossible. I ran up to her apartment like lightning; I spoke to no servant, but entered without hesitation, as I knew the house, and opened the door of her chamber.

I found her sitting motionless at her toilet table, covered with jewels. Her maid was arranging her hair, while she held in her hand a small piece of red stuff, with which she was gently rubbing her cheeks. I thought I was in a dream; it did not appear to me possible that this could be the woman I had seen a quarter of an hour before stretched upon the floor, overcome with grief. I stood like a statue. She, hearing the door open, turned her head with a smile. "Is that you?" she said. She was going to a ball, and was expecting my rival, who was to take her. She saw who it was, and closed her lips with a frown.

I took a step towards the door. I looked at her supple, perfumed neck, where her hair was arranged with a diamond comb. This neck, the seat of vital force, was blacker than hell. Two shining tresses were twisted there, with light silver clusters above them. Her neck and shoulders, whiter than milk, contrasted with her abundant hair. There was something in this coiffure shamelessly beautiful, which seemed to rouse me from the confusion in which I had looked at it a moment before. I took a step forward suddenly, and struck this neck a blow with the back of my clenched fist. My mistress cried out and fell upon her hands as I rushed out.

Returning home, the fever seized me again with such violence that I was obliged to go to bed. My wound had reopened, and I suffered greatly from it. Desgenais came to see me, and I told him what had taken place. He listened in profound silence, and then paced the room for some

time, as if undecided what to do. At last he stopped in front of me and burst out laughing.

"Is she your first mistress?" he said.

"No," I replied; "my last."

Towards the middle of the night, as I was in a restless sleep, I seemed to hear in a dream a deep sigh. I opened my eyes and saw my mistress standing beside my bed, with her arms crossed, looking like an apparition. I could not help uttering a cry, believing it to be the work of my disordered brain. I leapt out of bed, and fled to the other end of the room. She came towards me, saying:

"It is I," and seizing me round the waist, dragged me back.

"What do you want?" I cried. "Leave me; for I could kill you now!"

"Ah, well, kill me," she said. "I have deceived and lied to you. I am wicked and miserable, but I love you and cannot leave you."

I looked at her. How beautiful she was! Her whole body trembled; her eyes, full of love, poured out torrents of pleasure. Her throat was bare; her lips burning. I lifted her in my arms, and, as I did so, said: "Be it so; before God, who can see us, and by the soul of my father, I swear to you I will kill you and myself too." I took a table-knife from the shelf and placed it beneath the pillow.

"Come, Octave," she said, with a smile, as she kissed me; "don't be foolish. Come, my child; all these horrors make you ill; you have fever. Give me the knife."

I saw she wanted to take it. "Listen to me, then," I said; "I don't know who you are, or what comedy you are playing, but as for me, I am not joking. I loved you as much as it is possible for a man to love on earth, and, to my own

misfortune and death, I still love you desperately. You come to tell me that you love me, too, and I am glad; but, for all that, there is something sacred in this world; if I am your lover to-night, no one else shall be your lover to-morrow. Before God, before God!" I repeated, "I will not take you again as my mistress, for I hate you as much as I love you. Before God, if you desire me, I will kill you to-morrow morning." As I said this I became quite delirious. She threw her cloak over her shoulders and ran out.

When Desgenais found out this incident, he said to me :

"Why did you not accept her? You must be very disgusted with her, for she is a fine woman."

"Are you joking?" I said. "Do you think such a woman can be my mistress? Do you think I should ever consent to share with another? Do you realize that she herself admits that another possessed her, and do you want me to forget that I love her so as to possess her too? If this is your kind of love, I am sorry for you."

Desgenais replied that he only loved courtesans, and did not take it so seriously.

"My dear Octave," he added, "you are very young; you would like many beautiful things which do not exist. You believe in a singular sort of love, of which, perhaps, you are capable; I believe you are, but do not envy you. You will have other mistresses, my friend, and one day you will regret what happened that night. When this woman came to you it is certain she loved you; she does not love you now, perhaps, for she may be in the arms of another; but she loved you that night in that room, and what does anything else matter? You had there a charming night offered to you, and you may be sure you will regret you did not accept the offer, for she will not return. A

woman will pardon any one except the man who does not desire her. Her love for you must have been tremendous for her to have come to seek you, knowing and confessing herself to be guilty, and perhaps expecting to be refused. Believe me, you will regret that night, for I can assure you, you will not have such another opportunity."

There was in all that Desgenais said such an air of simple and profound conviction, such tranquillity born of experience, that I shuddered as I listened to him. While he was speaking I felt a violent temptation to go again to the house of my mistress, or to write to her and invite her. I was unable to get up, so I was saved from exposing myself to the shame of again finding her either awaiting my rival, or else with him. But I still had the ability to write to her, and I asked myself almost unwillingly if she would come were I to write to her.

When Desgenais was gone, I felt so much agitation that I decided to put an end to it in some way or another. After a terrible struggle, horror at last gained the mastery over love. I wrote to my mistress that I would never see her again, and begged her not to call upon me, if she did not wish to run the risk of having my door shut in her face. I rang loudly and ordered the letter to be delivered as quickly as possible. As soon as the servant closed the door I tried to call him back. He did not hear me, and I dared not call a second time; so, burying my face in my hands, I remained a prey to blank despair.

CHAPTER IV

THE next day, at sunrise, my first thought was to ask myself : " What shall I do now ? "

I had no occupation or business. I had studied the law and medicine, without being able to make up my mind to take to either of these careers ; I had been employed by a banker for six months, but I had been so inaccurate that I had been obliged to resign my post to prevent being dismissed. I had done good, but superficial, study, having a memory glad of exercise, but able to forget as easily as to learn.

My only treasure after love was independence. From my youth I had made a cult of it, and, so to speak, consecrated it in my heart. One day my father, thinking of my future, had spoken to me of several callings, of which he had given me the choice. I leaned out of my window and looked at a slender, solitary poplar in the garden. I reflected on all these different professions, and deliberated over the choice. I reviewed them in my mind right up to the end ; after which, feeling no taste for either of them, I allowed my thoughts to wander. I suddenly seemed to feel the earth move, as if the great invisible force which controls it in space had suddenly become perceptible to my senses ; I saw it rise into space ; it seemed to me that I was on board a ship ; the poplar in front of me seemed like the mast ; I got up, stretched myself and cried : " It is a small enough thing to be a passenger for a day on this ship floating in the ether ; it is little enough to be a man, a black point upon the ship ; I will be a man, but not a particular kind of man ! "

This was the first vow that, at the age of fourteen, I had pronounced in the face of nature, and since that time I had only made efforts to obtain employment out of obedience to my father, without the power of overcoming my repugnance.

I was therefore free, not from idleness, but from my own will; and I loved, too, everything made by God, and very little made by man. Of life I had only known love, of the world only my mistress, and I did not desire to know more. So on falling in love after I left college, I really believed that it would last for my whole life, and every other thought disappeared.

My existence was a sedentary one. I spent the day with my mistress; my chief pleasure was to take her into the country during the beautiful summer days, and to lie near her in the woods upon the grass or fern, the spectacle of nature in its splendour having always been for me the most powerful of aphrodisiacs. In the winter, as she loved society, we went to balls and masquerades, so that my life of idleness never ceased; but now, because I thought only of her while she was faithful to me, after she had deceived me I found myself without an idea.

To give some idea of the state of my mind, I can only compare it to one of those rooms in which furniture of every date, and from every land, is mingled in a confused mass. Our century has no form. We have impressed no stamp of our time either on our houses, our gardens, or anything at all. In the streets are to be met people with beards trimmed as in the time of Henry III, others who are clean shaven, others with hair arranged as in the pictures of Raphael, and others as in the days of Jesus Christ. So the apartments of the rich are rooms full of curiosities: antique, Gothic, the Renaissance period and

Louis XIII period, all mingled together. So we have things belonging to every century but our own, a state of affairs which has never occurred at any other period; eclecticism is our taste; we take all we find, this for its beauty, that for its comfort, the other for its antiquity, or even for its ugliness; so that we live among relics as if the end of the world was near.

Such was my state of mind; I had read widely and learned to paint. I knew by heart many things without order, so that sometimes my head was empty, while at another it was swollen like a sponge. I became an admirer of all the poets, one after the other; but as I was by nature very impressionable, the last one always made me feel disgusted with the others. I had made myself into a great ruin storehouse, and at last, being unable to acquire more novelties, I became a ruin myself.

But upon this ruin there was still something young: it was the hope of my heart, which was only a child.

This hope, which nothing had withered or corrupted, and which love had exalted even to excess, had suddenly received a mortal wound. The treachery of my mistress had wounded it deeply, and, when I thought of it, I felt in my soul something struggling convulsively like the agonies of a wounded bird.

Society, which does so much ill, resembles that Indian serpent whose dwelling is the leaf of the plant which cures its bite; it presents almost always the remedy by the side of the suffering it has caused. For example, a man who leads a regular life, devoting part of his time to business, part to visiting, part to work, and part to love, can lose his mistress without danger. His occupation and thoughts are like impassive soldiers

drawn up in line of battle; when a bullet strikes one down, the others close up, and he is not missed.

I had not this resource, since I was alone; Nature, my beloved mother, on the other hand, seemed more vast to me than ever. If I could have entirely forgotten my mistress, I should have been saved. How many people there are to whom so much is not necessary for their cure! They are incapable of loving a faithless woman, and their conduct in such a case is a model of firmness. But is it thus we love at nineteen, when, knowing nothing of the world, and desiring everything, the young man feels at the same time the germ of all the passions? What doubt has one at this age? To right, to left, below, on the horizon everywhere there is a voice calling. Everything is desire, everything reverie. There is no reality when the heart is young; there is no oak so gnarled and hard that a dryad does not emerge from it; and if a man had a hundred arms, he would not fear to open them; he has only to embrace his mistress and the void is filled.

I did not conceive that a man did anything but love, and when people spoke to me of another occupation, I made no reply. My passion for my mistress had been almost a savage one, and my whole life felt something fierce and wild in it. I will only quote one example. She gave me her miniature in a locket, and I wore it next my heart, as many men do; but finding, one day, in a curiosity shop, an iron instrument of penance, at the end of which was a plate bristling with spikes, I had the locket fastened to the plate and wore it so. Those spikes, which entered my breast at each movement, gave me such profound pleasure that I sometimes leant my hand upon them to feel them more. I knew very well it was folly; but love is the cause of many such things.

Since this woman had deceived me, I had taken off the cruel locket. I cannot say how sadly I undid the iron band, and what a profound sigh escaped me when I found myself free! "Ah, poor scars!" I said to myself; "you will soon be effaced! Ah, wound, my dear wound! what balm shall I rub upon you?"

I tried in vain to hate this woman; she was, so to speak, in the blood of my veins; I cursed her, but dreamt of her. How could I help that? What could I do to a dream? Macbeth, after killing Duncan, said that the ocean would not wash clean his hands; it would not have washed away my scars. I said to Desgenais: "What can I do? As soon as I get to sleep, her head is there upon the pillow."

I had only lived through this woman; to distrust her was to distrust every one; to curse her, to disown everything; to lose her, to destroy everything. I did not go out, the world appeared to me to be peopled with monsters, wild beasts and crocodiles. To everything said to distract me I replied: "Yes, it is a good idea, but I am sure I shall not adopt it."

I sat at the window and said to myself: "I am sure she will come; she is coming, she is turning the corner; I can feel that she is approaching. She cannot live without me, any more than I can without her. What shall I say to her? What expression shall I wear?" Then her treachery would come back to my mind. "Ah, she had better not come! Should I write to her and tell her not to come, for fear I might kill her?"

After my last letter, I heard her spoken of no more. "What is she doing?" I said to myself; "she loves another. Let me also love another too... But whom to love?" All the while I was looking for some one to love I heard, as if it were

the sound of a distant voice: "You love some one instead of me! Two beings who love and embrace, and are not you and I. Is it possible? Are you mad?"

"Coward!" Desgenais said to me! "when will you forget this woman? Is she, then, such a great loss? Is it such a great pleasure to be loved by her? Take the first comer."

"No," I answered him, "it is not such a great loss. Have I not done my duty and driven her away from here? What have you to say? The rest concerns me alone; bulls wounded in a bull-fight are at liberty to go and lie down in a corner with the matador's sword in their shoulders, and end their lives in peace. Tell me what I am to do. Where are your first comers? You shall show me a clear sky, trees and houses, men who talk, drink and sing, dancing women and galloping horses. All that is not life, it is the din of life. Go away, and leave me to rest."

CHAPTER V

WHEN Desgenais saw that there was no remedy for my despair, that I would listen to no one, and that I would not leave my room, he considered the matter serious. I saw him come one evening, with a grave air; he spoke of my mistress, and continued to chaff me by telling me everything bad about women which he could recollect. While he

was talking I leant upon my elbow, and, rising up in bed, listened to him attentively.

It was one of those dark evenings when the whistling wind sounds like the groans of the dying; a fine rain was beating against the windows; the birds had taken refuge in the bushes, and the streets were empty. My wound was paining me. A little while before I had a mistress and a friend; my mistress had deceived me, and my friend had laid me upon a bed of sickness. I could not then clearly unravel everything which passed through my brain; sometimes it seemed to me that I had had a horrible dream, and that I had only to close my eyes to wake up the next morning happy; sometimes my whole life appeared like a ridiculous and childish dream, whose falseness had been revealed. Desgenais was sitting in front of me near the lamp; he was firm and serious, with an everlasting smile. He was a man full of heart, but dry as pumice-stone. A precocious adventure had made him bald before his time; he knew life, and had wept in his time; but his grief wore a cuirass; he was a materialist, and awaited death.

"Octave," he said to me, "from what takes place in you, I see that you believe in love such as the poets and novelists represent it to be; you believe in words, and not in acts. That comes of not reasoning in a sound way, and may lead you into great trouble."

"Poets represent love as the sculptors do beauty, and as musicians create melody; that is, being blessed with an exquisite nervous organization, they skilfully and earnestly collect the purest elements in life, the most beautiful lines of their material, and the most harmonious voices in nature. There were, it is said, at Athens a large number of beautiful girls; Praxiteles drew them all, one after the other; and afterwards, from all

these different beauties, each with some fault, he made a unique beauty without a fault, and created Venus. The first man who made an instrument of music, and gave to that art its laws and regulations, had first listened for a long time to the murmur of the reeds and the voices of the singing birds. So the poets who knew life, after seeing many more or less fleeting loves, after having felt to some depth the sublime exaltation which passion can sometimes induce, and cutting off from human nature the elements which degrade it, created those mysterious names which passed from age to age upon men's lips—Daphnis and Chloe, Hero and Leander, Pyramus and Thisbe.

"Looking in real life for eternal and absolute love like theirs, is the same as looking in the public streets for women as beautiful as Venus, or desiring to hear the nightingales sing Beethoven's symphonies.

✓ "Perfection does not exist; to understand it is the triumph of human intelligence; to desire its possession is the most dangerous human folly. Open your window, Octave; do you not see the infinite? do you not feel that the sky has no boundaries? does not your reason tell you so? But do you realize the infinite? Can you, who was born yesterday, and will die to-morrow, have any idea of something without an end? This spectacle of immensity has, in every country of the world, produced the most insanity. Religions come from that; Cato cut his throat in order to possess the infinite, and for the same reason Christians gave themselves to the lions, and Huguenots to the Catholics; all the peoples of the world have stretched out their arms to that immense space, and wished to hurl themselves towards it. The madman desires to possess the sky; the sage admires it, and kneels down, but does not desire it.

"Perfection, friend, is no more made for us than is immensity. We must not look for it in anything, nor ask for it in anything, neither in love, beauty, happiness, nor virtue; but a man must love it as much as he can to be virtuous, beautiful and happy."

"Let us, then, suppose that you have in your study a picture by Raphael, which you look upon as being perfect; let us suppose that yesterday evening, while closely examining it, you discovered in one of the figures of the picture a gross mistake in the drawing, a broken limb, or an unnatural muscle, as is to be found in one of the arms of the ancient gladiator; you would certainly feel great disappointment, but you would not throw your picture on the fire; you would simply say that it was not perfect, but that there was much to be admired in it.

"There are women whose natural goodness and sincerity of heart prevent them from having two lovers at the same time. You thought your mistress was one of them, and it would have been better if she had been. You discovered she deceived you; did that oblige you to despise and ill-treat her, and think her worthy of your hatred?

"Even if your mistress had never deceived you, and still loved you only, think, Octave, how far from perfection still her love would be, how small, human and restrained by the laws of the world's hypocrisy: think that another man possessed her before you, and more than one man, even; that others will possess her after you.

"Reflect on this: the idea of perfection which you had conceived about your mistress, and which has been dispelled, is what is driving you to despair. But as soon as you understand that the idea itself was small, human and constrained, you will see one step, more or less, upon this mighty,

rotten ladder of human imperfection is a very little thing.

" You would willingly agree—would you not?—that your mistress has had other men, and will have others too; you would, without doubt, tell me that, since you know it, it does not matter to you, as long as she loves you, and has no one else while she loves you. But I say: as she has had other men as well as you, what difference does it make if it were yesterday, or two years ago? As she will have other men, what does it matter whether it is to-morrow, or in two years' time? Since she can only love you once, and does so, what does it matter whether it is for two years, or for one night? Are you a man, Octave? Do you see the leaves fall from the trees, and the sun rise and set? Do you hear the clock of life tick at each beat of your heart? Is there, then, so great a difference between the love of a year or the love of an hour, to us fools who, from this window, the size of a man's hand, can see the infinite?

✓ " You call the woman who loves you faithfully for two years honest; you have, apparently, an almanack expressly for the purpose of showing how many times men's kisses dry on women's lips. You draw a great distinction between the woman who gives herself for money, and the one who gives herself for pleasure—between the one who gives herself for pride, and the one who gives herself for devotion. Among the women you buy, some cost more than others; among those you have through vanity, you show yourself more glorious to some than to others; and of those to whom you are devoted, to some you would give a third of your heart, to others a quarter, to others a half, according to their education, name, birth, beauty, temperament, and the occasion, or

according to the time and what you have drunk at dinner.

" You have women, Octave, because you are young and ardent, because you have an oval, regular face, and arrange your hair with care; but for the same reason you do not know what a woman is.

" Nature, before everything else, desires the reproduction of beings; everywhere, from the top of the mountains to the bottom of the sea, life is afraid of death. God, to preserve His work, has therefore established this law, that the greatest enjoyment of all living things is in the act of generation. The palm-tree, as it sends to its female its fertilized dust, quivers with love in the burning winds; the stag, in rut, rips up the hind if she resists him; the dove throbs beneath the wings of the male like a sensitive lover; and the man, as he holds in his arms his companion, at the breast of all-powerful nature, feels the divine spark which created him leap up in his heart.

" My friend, when you clasp in your bared arms a strong and beautiful woman, if the pleasure draws tears from you, if you feel oaths of eternal love sobbing on your lips, if the infinite descends into your heart, do not fear to deliver yourself; make your escape with a courtesan.

" But do not confound the wine with the intoxication; do not think the cup, from which you drank the divine beverage, divine; do not be astonished in the evening to find it empty and broken: it is a woman, a fragile vase made of clay by a potter.

" Thank God for showing you the sky; but, because you flap your wings, do not think you are a bird. The birds themselves cannot traverse the clouds; there is a sphere where there is no air for them, and the lark, which rises singing into the

morning mist, sometimes falls dead to the ground. Take love as a sober man takes wine; do not become a drunkard. If your mistress is sincere and faithful, love her for that: but if she is not, and is young and beautiful, love her because she is young and beautiful; and if she is agreeable and clever, love her still; and if she is none of these things, and simply loves you, love her also. One cannot be loved every evening.

"Do not tear your hair and talk of stabbing yourself because you have a rival. You say your mistress deceives you for another; it is your pride that suffers: but change the order of the words: say that she deceives him for you, and you will glory in it.

"Make no rules for your conduct, and do not say you wish to be loved exclusively of every one else; for by saying that, as you are a man, and inconstant yourself, you are forced to add: 'As far as possible.'

"Take the weather as it comes, the wind as it blows, and woman as she is. Spanish women—the best of women—love faithfully; their heart is sincere and violent, but they wear a stiletto near it. The Italian women are lascivious, but they look for broad shoulders, and choose their lover with a tailor's measure. The English women are melancholy and extreme, but cold and stiff. The German women are tender and gentle, but insipid and monotonous. The French women are clever, elegant and voluptuous, but are very untruthful.

"Above all, do not accuse women of being what they are; we have made them so, undoing nature's work on all occasions.

"Nature, who thinks of everything, has made the virgin for a lover; but after her first child, her hair comes out, her breasts lose their shape, her body bears a mark; woman is made to be a

mother. The man would then, perhaps, leave her, disgusted at the loss of her beauty; but his child clings to him, crying. That is the human law of the family; everything which tends to avert it is monstrous. The reason that peasants are so virtuous is because their wives are machines for bearing and suckling children, while the men are labouring machines. They have neither false hair nor virginal milk; but there is nothing leprous in their love; they do not see in their simple embraces that America has been discovered. Not being sensual, their wives are healthy; they have hard hands, but not hard hearts.

"Civilization goes contrary to nature. In our towns, and according to our manners, the virgin, who is made to run in the sunlight, to admire the naked wrestlers, as at Lacedemonia, to choose and to love, is shut up under lock and key. She, however, conceals beneath her crucifix a romance; pale and idle, she corrupts herself before her mirror, in the silence of the night she causes to fade that beauty which stifles her and needs the open air. Then, suddenly, she is taken from there, knowing nothing, loving nothing, but desiring everything; an old woman instructs her, an obscene word is whispered in her ear, and she is cast into the bed of an unknown, who violates her. That is marriage, the civilized family. Then the poor girl has a child; the beauty of her hair, her breasts and her body is gone; she has lost a lover's beauty without loving! She has conceived, and given birth to a child, and is asking the reason. A child is brought to her, and she is told: 'You are a mother.' She replies: 'I am not a mother; give this child to a woman who has milk, I have none in my breasts.' It is not in this way that milk comes to women. Her husband replies that she is right, that her child would dis-

gust her. She is cared for, and cured of the evil of maternity. A month afterwards she is at the Tuilleries, in the ball-room, at the Opera ; her child is at Chaillot, or at Auxerre ; her husband is in a house of ill-fame. Ten young fellows speak to her of love, devotion, sympathy, eternal embraces ; of all that she has in her heart. She takes one, and draws him to her breast ; he dishonours her, turns away, and goes to the Stock Exchange. Now she is launched on her way ; she weeps for a whole night, and finds that the tears make her eyes red. She takes a consoler, and, when she loses him, another consoler, and so on till she is more than thirty. Then, surfeited and cankered, having nothing human left in her, not even disgust, she meets one evening, at a ball, a fine youth with black hair, bright eyes and a heart full of hope : she recognizes his youth, remembers her own sufferings, and, giving him lessons from her own life, teaches him never to love.

" That is the woman as you have made her ; of such are our mistresses. But they are women, too, and have their good moments !

✓ " If you had a firm character, were sure of yourself, and a real man, I would advise you this : launch yourself fearlessly into the torrent of the world ! have courtesans, dancers, peasants and noble ladies. Be constant and faithless, sad and joyous, deceived or respected ; but know if you are loved, for as soon as you are loved, what does everything else matter ?

" If you were an ordinary, commonplace man, I think you would look for some time before making up your mind, but you would count upon nothing of what you expected to find in your mistress.

" If you were a weak man, inclined to allow yourself to dominate and to take root where you see a little soil, I would advise you to make a

cuirass which will resist everything; for if you yield to your feeble nature, you will not spread further than the place where you have taken root; you will wither away like a barren plant, and have neither flowers nor fruit. The sap of your life will pass into a foreign stem; all your actions will be as pale as the leaves of the willow; you will only have your own tears as moisture, and your own heart as food.

"But if you are of an enthusiastic nature, believing in dreams and wishing to realize them, I would reply to you simply: 'Love does not exist.'

"For I quite agree with you and say: 'To love is to give oneself body and soul, or, perhaps better, to make one being out of two; it is to walk in the sunlight, in the fresh air, in the midst of the meadows and corn, with a body with four arms, two heads and two hearts. Love is faith, the religion of earthly happiness; it is a luminous triangle placed in the vaulted roof of this temple which is called the world. To love is to walk freely in this temple, and to have at one's side a being capable of understanding why a thought, a word, or a flower, make you stop and raise your head towards the celestial triangle. The exercise of the noble faculties of man is a great blessing, that is why genius is such a beautiful thing; but to double these faculties, to press one heart and one intelligence upon another heart and another intelligence, is supreme happiness. God has done nothing more for man; that is why love is better than genius. Now, tell me, is that our wives' ideas of love? No; no, it must be admitted it is not. Love for them is quite a different thing; it means to go out veiled, to write mysteriously, to walk trembling on the tips of the toes, to plot and joke, to cast languishing glances, to utter chaste

sighs in a stiff and starched dress, and then draw the bolts and take it off to humiliate a rival, to deceive a husband, and to drive her lovers to despair; love to our wives is to play at lying, like children play at hide and seek: it is a hideous debauch of the heart, worse than all the Roman lubricity at the Saturnalia of Priapus; it is a bastard parody of vice as well as of virtue, a dull and inferior comedy, in which every one whispers and works with averted gaze, in which everything is little, elegant and deformed, as in those porcelain monsters brought from China; it is a lamentable derision of beauty and ugliness, of the divine and infernal in the world, a shadow without a body, and a skeleton of all that God has made."

This Desgenais spoke in a cutting voice through the silence of the night.

CHAPTER VI

I WAS next day in the Bois de Boulogne before dinner; the weather was dull. When I reached the Maillot Gate, I let my horse go where he pleased, and giving myself up to deep reflection, I considered, bit by bit, all that Desgenais had said to me.

As I crossed a ride I heard my name called. I turned and saw in an open carriage one of my mistress's intimate friends. She called on me to stop, and, holding out her hand in a friendly way,

asked me to come and dine with her if I had nothing better to do.

This woman, whose name was Madam Levasseur, was small, plump and very blonde; she always displeased me—I don't know why, as our relations had always been friendly. But I could not resist the desire to accept the invitation; I pressed her hand and thanked her, for I felt that we were going to speak of my mistress.

She lent me some one to take charge of my horse; I got into the carriage, in which she was alone, and immediately we set out on the way back to Paris. Rain commenced to fall, so the carriage was closed up, and we at first remained silent. I looked at her with inexpressible sorrow; not only was she the friend of my faithless one, but she was her confidante. Often, during our happy days, she had been the third in our party. How impatiently I had endured her company then! How many times had I counted the moments she spent with us! That was, doubtless, the cause of my aversion to her. I knew she approved of my love, and even sometimes defended me to my mistress in the days of discord, and I could pardon her importunity because of her friendship. In spite of her goodness, and the services she had rendered us, she seemed to me ugly and tiresome. Alas, now I thought her beautiful! I looked at her hands, and her clothes, and each gesture reached my heart; the past was written there. She saw me, she experienced what I felt near her, and how the souvenirs oppressed me. The journey passed thus, I looking at her, while she smiled at me. At last, when we entered Paris, she took my hand. "Ah, well!" she said. "Ah, well!" I replied, sobbing; "tell her if you will." I shed a torrent of tears.

But when, after dinner, we were sitting by the

side of the fire, she said: "Is this all quite irrevocable? Is there no way?"

"Alas, madam," I answered her, "there is nothing irrevocable but grief, which will kill me. My story is not a long one to tell; I can neither love her, nor love another, nor do without love." She lolled back in her chair at these words, and I could see in her face the signs of her pity. For a long time she seemed to reflect and look back upon her own life, as if looking for an echo in her heart. Her eyes seemed veiled, and she remained as if buried in recollection. She stretched out her hand to me, and I approached her. "I, too," she murmured, "have experienced it all." Fierce emotion stopped her.

Of all love's sisters, one of the most beautiful is pity. I held the hand of Madam Levasseur, she was almost in my arms; she began to say everything she could recollect in my mistress's favour, to pity me as much as to excuse her. My sorrow increased. What could I say? She began to speak of herself.

Not long before, she told me, a man who loved her had left her. She had made great sacrifices; her fortune was involved, as well as the honour of her name. From her husband, whom she knew to be vindictive, she had received threats. It was a story mingled with tears, which interested me so much, that in listening to her sorrows I forgot my own. She had been married against her will after a long struggle, but she had no regrets, except that she was no longer loved. I even thought she blamed herself, in some way, for being unable to retain her lover's heart, and for acting with fickleness towards him.

When, after soothing her heart, she became, little by little, silent and uncertain, I said to her: "No, madam, it was not chance which led me

to-day into the Bois de Boulogne. Let me think that human sorrow is an erring sister, but that there is a good angel somewhere, who sometimes purposely unites those weak and trembling hands outstretched to God. Since I saw you, and you called me, do not repent that you have spoken; and whoever listens to you need not be ashamed of his tears. The secret you have confided to me is only a tear fallen from your eyes, but it has remained upon my heart. Allow me to come and see you again, and let us sometimes suffer together."

Such a keen sympathy carried me out of myself in speaking thus, and, without reflecting, I embraced her; it never occurred to me that she might be offended, and she did not even appear to notice it.

A deep silence reigned in the house where Madam Levasseur lived. Some resident being ill, straw had been spread in the street, so that the traffic should not make a noise. I was close to her, holding her in my arms, and giving myself up to the sweetest emotions of the heart, the sentiment of a sorrow shared.

Our conversation continued in a tone of the most expansive friendship. She told me of her sufferings, I told her of mine; and between these two overlapping sorrows I felt some gentleness rise, a consoling voice, like pure and celestial harmony, formed by the concert of groans. But during all these tears, as I was leaning over Madam Levasseur, I could only see her face. In a moment of silence, rising and going a little way from her, I saw that, while we were talking, she had put her foot so high upon the chimney-piece that her dress had fallen back, and her leg was entirely bare. It appeared to me strange that, seeing my confusion, she did not move, and

I moved a little way and turned my head, to give her time to adjust her dress; but she did nothing. Returning to the chimney-piece, I remained leaning there in silence, looking at the disorder, which was too revolting to be endured. At last, meeting her eyes, and seeing quite clearly that she knew what had taken place, I was thunderstruck! for I saw clearly that I was the dupe of such monstrous effrontery that grief itself was but a seduction of the senses. I took my hat without saying a word; she gently put her dress straight, and I went out of the room as quickly as possible.

CHAPTER VII

ON reaching home, I found in the midst of my chamber a large wooden chest. One of my aunts had died, and left me a little of her property. This chest contained, among other things, a quantity of dusty books. Having nothing to do, and being eaten up with ennui, I decided to read some of them. They were, for the most part, novels of the century of Louis XV; my aunt, who was very devout, having probably inherited them, had kept them without reading them; for they were so many catechisms of debauchery.

I have a singular state of mind, a propensity to reflect upon all that happens to me, even the most trifling incidents, and give them a sort of consistent and moral reason; I do it as if they

were beads, and, in spite of myself, I try to collect them on one thread.

It may appear childish, but the arrival of those books struck me in the circumstances in which I was placed. I devoured them with boundless sadness and bitterness, with a broken heart and a smile upon my lips. "Yes, you are right," I said to them; "you alone know the secrets of life; you alone dare to say that debauchery, hypocrisy and corruption are the only real things. Be my friends, pour upon the wounds in my soul your corrosive poisons; teach me to believe in you."

While I was thus busying myself in darkness, my favourite poets and books of study remained covered with dust. I trampled them under foot in the access of my rage. "And you," I said to them, "mad dreamers, who only teach how to suffer, miserable arrangers of words, charlatans if you know the truth, but ninnies if you are writing in good faith; liars in both cases, who make fairy-tales with the human heart, I will burn you all, every one of you!"

In the midst of it all tears came to my aid, and I perceived that my own sorrow was the only real thing. "Ah, well!" I cried in my delirium; "tell me, good and bad geniuses, counsellors for good or ill, tell me, then, what to do! Choose an arbitrator between us."

I seized an old Bible, which was upon my table, and opened it haphazard. "Answer me, Word of God," I said to it; "let me know a little of your opinion." I came upon these words from Ecclesiastes, chapter ix.—

"For all this I considered in my heart, even to declare all this, that the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God; no man knoweth love nor hatred by all that is before them."

"All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth and to him that sacrificeth not; as is the good, so is the sinner, and he that sweareth as he that feareth an oath."

"This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all; yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live; and after that they go to the dead."

I remained stupefied after reading these words: I did not think such a sentiment existed in the Bible. "So," I said to it, "you, also, doubt, book of hope!"

✓ What, then, do astronomers think when they predict the time and place of the passage of a comet, the most irregular of our heavenly travellers? What do naturalists think when they show you, through a microscope, animals in a drop of water? Do they think they invent what they see, and their microscopes and glasses make nature's laws? What, then, did the first of men's legislators think when, seeking the first stone in the social edifice, and irritated, without doubt, by some inopportune speaker, he struck upon the brazen tables, and felt the law of retaliation cry out within him? Had he, then, invented justice? Did he, who first took from the ground the fruits planted by his neighbour, put them under his cloak and fled, looking to right and left as he went, invent shame? Did he who, finding this thief, who had robbed him of the result of his toil, first pardon him, and, instead of striking him, say: "Sit down there, and take this as well"? When, after returning good for evil, he raised his head to heaven, and felt his heart tremble, and his eyes fill with tears, and his knees bend to the

earth, did he invent virtue? Oh God! oh God! there is a woman who speaks of love and deceives me; there is a man who speaks of friendship and advises me to seek distraction in debauchery; there is another who weeps, and wishes to console me with the muscles of her legs; there is a Bible which speaks of God, and answers: "Perhaps, all that is immaterial."

I rushed to my open window. "Is it, then, true that you are empty?" I cried, as I looked at the pale-blue sky above my head. "Answer, answer! Before I die, will you show me something more than a dream between these two arms here?" ✓

A deep silence reigned upon the square on which my window looked. As I remained there, with my arms extended and my eyes lost in space, a swallow uttered a plaintive cry; I followed it with my eyes unwittingly; as it disappeared from sight like a flash, a girl passed, singing.

CHAPTER VIII

I DID not wish to yield. Before looking upon the pleasant side of life, and this appeared to me now to be the sinister side, I resolved to try everything. I therefore was for long a prey to numberless chagrins and terrible dreams.

The great reason which prevented my cure was my youth. Wherever I was, or whatever I was

doing, my thoughts were only of women; the sight of a woman made me tremble. How many times did I get up during the night bathed in sweat, to rest my mouth upon the walls, feeling as if I were about to be suffocated!

One of the greatest, and perhaps the rarest happinesses had happened to me, that of giving my virginity to love. But the result of it was that every idea of pleasure to the senses in me was united with the idea of love; that was my downfall. For being unable to prevent myself continually thinking of women, I could do nothing at the same time but think, day and night, of those ideas of debauchery, false love, and feminine betrayal, of which my head was full. To possess a woman, for me was to love her; now I thought of nothing but women, and I no longer believed in the possibility of true love.

All this suffering inspired me with something like rage; sometimes I desired to do as the monks do, and wound myself to overcome my senses; at other times I wished to go into the street, or into the country, or anywhere else, and throw myself at the feet of the first woman I met, and swear eternal love for her.

God is my witness that I tried every means of distracting and curing myself. At first, full of the involuntary idea that men's society was the abode of vice and hypocrisy, where every one was like my mistress, I resolved to keep away from it entirely, and isolate myself. I resumed my former studies: history, the ancient poets and anatomy. There was upon the fourth floor of the house a very learned old German, who lived in retirement by himself. I persuaded him, not without trouble, to teach me his language; and, when he had undertaken to do so, he took it very seriously. My inattention grieved him. Many a time

when I was sitting with him in the light of his smoky lamp, he sat in patient astonishment, his hands folded on his book, looking at me, while, lost in my dreams, I did not perceive either his presence or his pity ! "Good sir," I said to him at last, "it is quite useless; but you are the best of men. What a task you have undertaken ! You must leave me to my destiny; we can do nothing, neither you nor I." I don't know whether he understood this language, but he pressed my hand without a word, and there was no more German.

I immediately felt that solitude, far from effecting my cure, was making me worse, so I completely changed the system. I went into the country, and took up the chase with zest; I fenced till I was out of breath; I wore myself out with fatigue, and when, after a day of sweat and of sport, I went to bed at night smelling of gunpowder and the stable, I buried my head in the pillow, rolled myself in the bed-clothes, and cried : "Phantom, phantom, are you not weary, too? will you leave me some night?"

But what was the use of these vain efforts? Solitude sent me back to nature, and nature sent me back to love. When, in the Rue de l'Observance, I saw myself surrounded with corpses, and wiping my hands upon my blood-stained apron, pale in the midst of the dead, suffocated by the odour of putrefaction, I turned in spite of myself, I saw, floating before my eyes, verdant meadows, scented fields and the pensive harmony of the evening. "No," I said to myself, "it is not science that will console me; I shall plunge into this dead nature in vain; I shall die in it, like a livid drowned man in the skin of a shorn lamb. I shall never cure myself of my youth; let me live, where there is life, or at least die in the sun." I

56 A Modern Man's Confession

set out, mounted a horse, and went far along the rides of Sèvres and of Chaville; I went to lie down in a flowering meadow, in a deserted valley. Alas! all these forests and fields cried out to me:

"What do you seek? We are green, poor child; we wear the colour of hope."

Then I returned to the city, and lost myself in its obscure streets; I looked at the lights shining from the windows of mysterious family nests, the passing carriages and the hurrying men. Oh, what solitude! what mournful smoke above the roofs! what sorrow in those winding streets, where every one tramps, works and sweats; where thousands of the unknown jostle one another! A sewer, in which the bodies alone are in society, leaving the souls alone, and in which there are only prostitutes, who stretch out their hands to the passers-by! Corrupt yourselves, corrupt yourselves, and you will suffer no more! This is what the towns cry out to man, what is written upon the walls in charcoal, upon the pavements in mud, and upon the faces in blood. ✓

Sometimes, when sitting by myself in a drawing-room at a brilliant party, as I watched all the women in red, blue, and white, dancing with their arms bare, and their wavy hair like cherubim intoxicated with light in their spheres of harmony and beauty: "Ah, what a garden!" I said to myself; "what flowers to pluck and smell! Ah! marguerites, marguerites, what will your last petal say to him who strips you of your leaves? A little, a little, and not everything! That is the morality of the world and the end of your smiles. It is above this terrible abyss that all this gauze, sprinkled with flowers, flutters so lightly; it is over this terrible truth you run on tip-toe, like hinds!"

"Ah," Desgenais said to me, "why take every-

thing so seriously? Other people do not do it. Do you complain that bottles are emptied? There are casks in the caves, and caves upon the coasts. Make me a hook, gilded with gentle words, with a honey-bee as a bait, and watch! Catch for me out of the river of oblivion a pretty consoler, fresh and sinuous as an eel; it will still remain after she has passed through our hands. Love, love! you will die of the desire for it. Youth will pass; and, if I were you, I would rather carry off the Queen of Portugal than study anatomy."

This was the advice he was always giving to me; and, when the time came, I took my way home, with an overflowing heart and my cloak over my face; I knelt at the edge of my bed, and my poor heart was relieved. Such tears, such vows, such prayers! Galileo struck the earth, saying: "It moves!" In the same way did I beat my breast.

CHAPTER IX

SUDDENLY, in the midst of the deepest sorrow, despair, youth and chance caused me to commit an action which decided my lot.

I had written to my mistress that I wished never again to see her; I kept my word, but I also spent nights beneath her windows, sitting upon a seat at her door; I watched the light in her windows and listened to the sound of her piano; sometimes

I could see her shadow between the half open curtains.

One night, as I sat upon this seat, overcome with sorrow, I saw a workman pass, singing as he went. He muttered disjointed words, mixed with exclamations of joy; then he broke off and started to sing. He had had too much to drink, and his weak legs conducted him first one way, and then the other. He sat down upon a seat opposite to me. There he rested for a time on his elbows, and then went off into a deep sleep.

The street was deserted, but a dry wind disturbed the dust; the moon, in the midst of a cloudless sky, illuminated the sleeping man. I was alone with this fellow, who did not suspect my presence, and who was sleeping more peacefully, perhaps, upon this stone than in his bed.

In spite of myself, this man distracted my attention from my own grief; I got up to leave him, but returned and sat down again. I could not leave this door, at which I would not have knocked for an empire; at last, after taking a walk, I stopped in front of the sleeper.

"How he sleeps!" I said to myself. "Assuredly this man does not dream; his wife, as it is so late, is perhaps opening the door of the attic in which he lives to his neighbour. His clothes are in rags, his cheeks are hollow, his hands wrinkled; he is some unfortunate person who hardly ever has anything to eat. A thousand devouring troubles, a thousand kinds of deadly anguish await him on his awakening; but to-night he had a few pence in his pocket, so he went into a tavern and purchased forgetfulness of his troubles; his week's work has produced sufficient to procure him a night's sleep, perhaps with the money for his children's supper. Now his mistress can deceive him, his friend can glide like a

thief into his wretched lodging; even if I were to strike him upon the shoulder, cry out that he was being assassinated, or that his house was on fire, he would turn over on his other side and go to sleep again.

"But as for me!" I continued, as I paced the street with long strides; "I, who have in my pocket enough money to provide a year's sleep, do not sleep. I am so proud and mad that I dare not enter a tavern, and I do not see that if all the unfortunate go there, it is because they are happy when they come away. A bunch of grapes crushed beneath numerous feet is sufficient to dissipate the blackest care, and to break these invisible ties which the genii of evil stretch across our path. We weep like women and suffer like martyrs, it seems to us in our despair that a world has fallen in pieces upon our heads, and we sit weeping like Adam at the gates of Eden. To cure a wound larger than the world, only a little motion of the hand, and a moistening of the breast, is necessary. How trifling, then, is our grief, if it can be consoled thus! We are amazed that the Providence, which sees it all, does not send its angels to grant our supplications; there is no need of so much suffering; Providence has seen all our sufferings, all our desires, all our pride and failing spirits, and the ocean of ills which surround us, and is content to suspend a little black fruit by the side of our paths. Since this man sleeps so soundly upon his seat, why should not I, too, sleep upon mine? My rival, perhaps, is spending the night with my mistress; he will leave her at daybreak; she will accompany him, half naked, to the door, and they will see me asleep. Their kisses will not awaken me, so they will strike me upon the shoulder; I shall turn over, and go off to sleep again."

Then, filled with savage joy, I went in search of a tavern. As it was after midnight, they were almost all closed; that made me furious. "What," I thought, "is even that consolation denied me?" I hastened in every direction, knocking at the shop doors, and crying: "Wine! wine!"

At last I found a place open; I called for a bottle of wine, and, without noticing whether it was good or bad, I drank glass after glass. I called for another bottle, and then a third. I treated myself as an invalid, and I forced myself to drink, as if it were a medicine prescribed by a doctor in a case of life or death.

Soon the fumes of the common liquor, which was, without doubt, adulterated, enveloped me in a cloud. As I had drunk hurriedly, intoxication overtook me all at once; I felt my thoughts become troubled, then calmed, and then troubled again. At last, when the power of reflection left me, I raised my eyes to the sky, as if I were saying good-bye to myself, and stretched my elbows upon the table.

Then, only, I noticed that I was not alone in the place. At the other extremity of the tavern was a group of hideous men, with wan faces and raucous voices. Their dress showed that they were not of the people, but they belonged to that ambiguous class, the vilest of all, which has neither position, fortune, nor even a trade, unless it be an ignoble one, which is neither poor nor rich, but which has the vices of one, and the miseries of the other.

They were disputing loudly over disgusting cards; in the midst of them was a very young and pretty girl, nicely dressed, who did not appear to resemble them in anything except her voice, which was hoarse and broken enough. Her face was as red as if she had been a town crier for

sixteen years. She gazed at me attentively, doubtless astonished to see me in a tavern, for I was elegantly and almost extravagantly dressed. She gently approached me, and, as she passed my table, lifted up the bottles, and smiled when she saw that all three were empty. I saw that she had superb teeth of dazzling whiteness; I took her hand, and begged her to sit down near me; she did so, without any demur, and ordered supper on her own account.

I looked at her without speaking, and my eyes filled with tears; she noticed, and asked me the reason. But I could make no reply, except to shake my head, as if to make my tears flow more freely, for I could feel them running down my cheeks. She understood that I had some secret sorrow, and did not try to find out the reason; she took out her handkerchief, and, while gaily supping, she from time to time wiped my face.

There was in this girl something so horrible and so gentle, so impudent and yet so full of pity, that I hardly knew what to think of her. If she had taken my hand in the street, she would have aroused in me a feeling of horror; but it appeared to me so strange that a creature whom I had never seen before, should come and, without a word, sup opposite to me, and dry my tears with her handkerchief, that I remained speechless, disgusted, and, at the same time, charmed. I heard the proprietor ask her if she knew me; she replied that she did, and asked him to leave me alone. Soon the card-players went away, and the proprietor, after shutting the outside door, went to the back of the premises, leaving me alone with the girl.

Everything had taken place so quickly, and I had obeyed such a strange movement of despair, that I believed myself in a dream, with my thoughts

struggling in a labyrinth. I seemed to be mad, or to have obeyed a supernatural power.

"Who are you?" I suddenly cried; "what do you want? How do you know me, and who has told you to wipe away my tears? Is it simply your profession to do so, and do you think I want you? I would not touch you with the tips of my fingers. What are you doing? Answer me! Is it money that you require? What is the price of your pity?"

I got up and tried to leave the place; but I felt that I was staggering. At the same time, my eyes grew dim, a mortal weakness seized me, and I fell upon a stool.

"You are suffering," the girl said to me, as she took my arm; "you have drunk like the child you are, without knowing what you were doing. Sit here, and wait till a cab passes in the street; you shall tell me where your mother lives, and the cab shall take you there, since," she added, laughing, "you really think I am ugly!"

As she spoke, I raised my eyes. Perhaps it was the intoxication which deceived me; I do not know whether I had not seen clearly till then, or whether I did not see properly then; but I suddenly saw that this poor girl had in her face a fatal resemblance to my mistress. I was frozen at the sight. There is a certain tremor which affects a man's hair; ignorant people say it is death passing above the head, but it was not death passing over mine.

It was the malady of the century, or rather the girl was herself it; and she came with her pale and mocking face, and harsh voice, and sat down before me at the back of the tavern.

CHAPTER X

As soon as I noticed that this woman resembled my mistress, a frightful, but irresistible, idea, emanating from my disordered brain, took possession of me, and I proceeded at once to carry it out.

During the early part of our love, my mistress sometimes came secretly to visit me. Those were fête days for my little room; flowers were brought, the fire burned cheerfully, and I got ready a good supper; the bed had, too, its bridal equipment to receive my beloved. Often, sitting on my couch beneath the mirror, I had gazed at her during those hours of silence, in which our hearts communed. I watched her change, like the fairy Mab, into paradise that little lonely space, in which I had so often wept. She was there in the midst of all the books, the scattered clothing, the worn furniture, and, between these four gloomy walls, how brilliantly she shone amid all this poverty!

These recollections, since I had lost her, ceaselessly pursued me; they took away my sleep from me. My books and my walls spoke to me of her; I could not bear them. My bed drove me into the streets; I had a horror of it when I was not weeping in it.

I took this girl there, and told her to sit down with her back to me; I made her half undress. Then I arranged my room around her, as I used to do for my mistress. I placed the couches where they had been one particular evening which I could recollect. Generally, in all our ideas of happy-

ness there is some dominating souvenir; a day, or an hour, which has surpassed all others, or which has been a type and a model; a moment has come in the midst of all that, when the man cried like Theodore, in the comedy of Lope de Vega: "Fortune puts a golden spoke in your wheel."

After arranging everything, I lit a large fire, and, sitting upon my heels, began to be intoxicated with a boundless despair. I went down to the bottom of my heart to feel it writhe and contract. I murmured a Tyrolean song which my mistress was always singing, and listened to the echo of this poor song in the desert of my heart. I said: "This is a man's happiness; this is my little paradise; and here is my fairy Mab, who is a child of the streets. My mistress is no better. This is what we find at the bottom of the glass after drinking the nectar of the gods; that is the corpse of love."

The poor girl, hearing me sing, began to sing too. I became as pale as death, for the raucous and ignoble voice, coming from a being who resembled my mistress, appeared to me as a symbol of what I experienced. It was the sound of debauch itself which came thick from the throat of this girl, who was in the prime of her youth. It seemed to me that my mistress, since her treachery, must have a similar voice. I thought of Faust, who, as he danced with a young and naked sorceress, saw a red mouse come out of her mouth.

"Be quiet!" I said to her. I got up and approached her; she sat down with a smile upon my bed, and I lay by her side, like my own statue upon my tomb. I ask you, men of the century, who take your pleasures at a ball, or at the opera, and who at night, on going to bed, read, to send

yourselves to sleep, some stale blasphemy from old Voltaire, some reasonable humour by Paul Louis Courier, or some economic discourse by a Parliamentary Commission; you, who breathe through some of your pores the cold origins of this monstrous water-lily which reason plants in the hearts of your cities; I ask you, if by chance this obscure book falls into your hands, do not smile with noble disdain, do not shrug your shoulders too much; do not say with too much certainty that I am complaining of an imaginary evil; that, after all, human reason is the most beautiful of all our faculties, and that the only realities here below are the business of the Stock Exchange, a gamble with the cards, wine from Bordeaux at table, good bodily health, indifference to others, and at night, in bed, languid muscles covered by a perfumed skin.

For some day, in the midst of your stagnant and motionless life, a gust of wind will rise. Those beautiful trees, which you water with the tranquil waters of the river of oblivion, Providence can stir from above; you can be in despair, you impassive people; there are tears in your eyes. I will not tell you that your mistresses deceive you, for that does not cause you as much pain as the death of a horse; but let us say that you are losing money on the Stock Exchange, or, with a good hand of cards, meet some one with a better; or, if you do not gamble, let us imagine that your money, your financial peace, your gold and silver happiness are entrusted to a banker who might fail, or invested in stock which does not pay a dividend; I mean that, however frigid you may be, you can love something; a fibre within can be loosened, and you can utter a cry which somewhat resembles a cry of grief. Some day, wandering

66 A Modern Man's Confession

through the muddy streets, when material joys are no longer there to occupy your superfluous strength, when you are without money and food, you will, perhaps, come down to looking round with hollow cheeks, and sitting down at midnight upon a deserted seat.

O men of marble, sublime egoists and inimitable reasoners that you are, who have never done a despairing act, or made a mistake in arithmetic, if it ever happens to you, in the hour of your ruin think of Abélard when he had lost Héloïse. For he loved her more than you love your horses, your money, or your mistresses; for in separating from her he lost more than you will ever lose, more than your prince Satan would lose by himself falling a second time from heaven; for he loved her with a love of which we do not read in the newspapers, and the representation of which our women and girls do not see at our theatres and in our books; he had spent half his life kissing her upon her open forehead, as he taught her to sing the Psalms of David and the Canticles of Saul; for he had no one but her upon earth, and yet God consoled him.

Believe me, when in your distress you think of Abélard, you will not see with the same eye the gentle blasphemies of old Voltaire, and the pleasantries of Courier; you will think that human reason can cure illusions, but not suffering; that God has made reason a good housewife, but not a Sister of Mercy. You will find that the heart of man, when he said: "I do not believe in anything, for I do not see anything," had not said the last word. You look around you for something like hope; you will go and rattle the church doors to see if they will swing back, but you will find them barred; you will try to make yourselves

into Trappist monks, and mocking destiny will answer you with a bottle of common wine and a courtesan.

If you drink the wine, and take the courtesan to your couch, learn what the result will be.

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

WHEN I awoke on the following morning, I was profoundly disgusted with myself, and so degraded in my own eyes that a horrible temptation took possession of me at my first movement. I jumped out of bed, and ordered the creature to dress herself and go as quickly as possible; then I sat down, and cast disconsolate glances upon the walls of my room, which glances mechanically rested on the corner where my pistols were suspended.

As the suffering thoughts advance as if with arms outstretched towards annihilation, the soul takes a violent step; it seems as if in the physical action of taking down a weapon and preparing it, even in the chill of the metal, there is a material horror, independent of the will; the fingers make the preparations in anguish, and the arms stiffen. The nature of any one, who goes to meet death, recoils within him. Thus I cannot express what I felt while the girl dressed, unless by saying that my pistol seemed to say to me: "Think what you are going to do."

Since I have often wondered what would have happened to me if, as I wished, the girl had dressed quickly and gone out. Without doubt, the first effect of shame would have been calmed; sorrow is not despair, and God has united them like brothers, so that one of them never leaves you alone with the other. As soon as the atmosphere

of my room had been relieved of this woman's presence, my heart would have been soothed. Repentance, which is forbidden to kill, would have been all that was left for me. But, without doubt, I should have been cured for life; debauchery would for ever have been driven away from my door, and the feeling of horror that her first visit had inspired in me would never have returned.

But things turned out quite differently. The struggle which had taken place in me, the painful reflections which overwhelmed me, disgust, fear, anger even (for I had a thousand different emotions at the same time), all these fatal powers nailed me to my couch. While I was thus a prey to the most dangerous delirium, the girl, leaning in front of the mirror, had no thought but to adjust her dress to the best advantage, after arranging her hair with a smile. This coquetry lasted more than a quarter of an hour, during which time I had almost succeeded in forgetting her. Then, attracted by the noise she made, I turned round impatiently, and begged her to go in such an angry tone that she was ready in a moment, and turned the handle of the door, throwing me a kiss as she did so.

At the same moment there was a ring at the bell. I got up hurriedly, and had just time to open a cupboard for the girl to enter. Desgenais came in at once, with two young fellows, my neighbours.

Those great streams of water met with in the midst of certain seas are like certain events in life. Fatality, chance, or Providence—what does the name matter? Those who think they deny one by opposing it with the other are only abusing words. But there is not one of them who, speaking of Cæsar or Napoleon, does not quite naturally say: "He was the man sent by Providence."

They apparently think that heroes are the only ones worthy of the attention of Heaven, and that purple attracts the gods as it does bulls.

Here below the most trifling things decide, and objects and circumstances which appear least important bring changes in our fortunes, and it seems to me this is a profound abyss for thought. Our ordinary actions are like little blunt arrows, which we shoot as far as we can, so that of all these little results we make an abstract and regular being, which we call our prudence, or our will. Then comes a gust of wind, and the smallest, lightest and most futile of these arrows is carried out of sight over the horizon into the mighty bosom of God.

How violently, then, are we seized! What do these phantoms of tranquil pride, the will and prudence, become then? Strength, itself the mistress of the world, the sword of man in the combat with life—it is in vain we brandish it in anger, that we try to protect ourselves, to escape the threatening blow; an invisible hand turns aside the point, and all the dash of our effort, turned aside into space, only serves to make us fall further.

So at the moment, then, I only aspired to wash myself of the fault I had committed, and perhaps even to punish myself for it; at the moment when a profound horror had taken possession of me, I learned that I had to submit to a dangerous test, to which I succumbed.

Desgenais was radiant; he began, as he sat down upon the sofa, to make a few jokes about my face, which, he said, had not slept very well. As I was not inclined to put up with his pleasantry, I begged him dryly to spare me.

He did not appear to take any notice, but in the same tone entered upon the subject that had

brought him. He came to tell me that my mistress had had not only two lovers at the same time, but even three; that is to say, that she had treated my rival as badly as she had treated me. When the poor boy had found this out he had made a fearful scene, and all Paris knew of it. I at first hardly understood what he said, as I was not paying much attention; but when, after making him repeat this terrible story three times in every detail, I became quite acquainted with it, remained so abashed and stupefied that I could make him no answer. My first idea was to laugh, for I clearly saw that I had only loved the last of women; but it was none the less true that I had loved her, and loved her still. "Is it possible?" was all I could manage to say.

The friends of Desgenais then confirmed all he had said. In her own house my mistress, surprised by her two lovers, had endured from them a scene which was now well known. She was dishonoured, and obliged to leave Paris, if she did not wish to expose herself to a worse scandal.

I could easily see that in all these pleasantries a good deal of ridicule was cast upon my duel on the subject of this woman, upon my invincible passion for her, and the whole of my conduct towards her. Saying that she deserved the most odious names, that she was after all only a wretched creature, who had perhaps done a hundred things worse, which had not been found out, made me keenly feel that I, like so many others, was only a dupe.

All this did not please me, and the young fellows, noticing this, were discreet; but Desgenais had his own projects; he had undertaken the task of curing me of my love, and he treated me without pity as a patient. A long friendship, founded upon mutual services, gave him the

right, and as his motive appeared to him a laudable one, he did not hesitate to carry out his treatment.

Not only did he not spare me, but, as soon as he saw my trouble and shame, he did his utmost to drive me in that direction as far as possible. My impatience soon became too noticeable for him to continue, so he stopped, and played a silent part, but this irritated me still more.

In my turn I asked a few questions as I paced the room. This story had been almost unbearable to me, but yet I would have liked it repeated. I tried to make my face assume a smiling or a calm look, but it was in vain. Desgenais had suddenly become mute, after showing himself to be a most detestable chatterer. While I paced the room with long strides, he looked at me with indifference, and let me behave like a fox in a menagerie.

I cannot say what my feelings were. For a woman who for so long had been the idol of my heart, and who, since I had lost her, had caused me such keen suffering, my only love, for whom I should weep as long as I lived, had suddenly become shameless, and the subject of the jests of young fellows, and universal scandal and censure. It seemed to me that I felt upon my shoulders the impression of a red-hot iron, and that I was marked with a burning brand.

The more I reflected, the more I felt the darkness gather around me. From time to time I turned my head, and I saw a glacial smile, or a curious look fixed upon me. Desgenais did not leave me; he knew quite well what he was doing; we were friends of long standing, and he knew very well that I was capable of all sorts of follies, and that the exaltation of my character could take me beyond all bounds in any direction save one. That

was the reason he did not honour my suffering, and called it down from the head to the heart.

When he at last saw me at the point he desired, he was not long in delivering his last thrust. "Does not the story please you?" he said to me. "The best of it is the end. The scene, my dear Octave, took place one beautiful moonlight night; now, while the two lovers were quarrelling in the lady's rooms, and talking of cutting each other's throats by the side of a good fire, it appears that there was to be seen in the street a shadow walking quietly along, and the shadow was so like you, that people have concluded that it was you."

"Who said that?" I replied. "Who saw me in the street?"

"Your mistress herself; she tells the story to all who like to listen, as gaily as we tell her story. She asserts that you love her still, and mount guard at her door, and so on . . . but it is sufficient to know that she talks about it in public."

I never learned how to lie properly, and every time I have desired to disguise the truth, my face has betrayed me. Self-respect, and shame at confessing my weakness before witnesses, caused me, however, to make an effort. "It is quite right," I said to myself; "I was in the street. But if I had known that my mistress was even worse than I believed her to be, I should not, certainly, have been there." So I persuaded myself that I could not have been distinctly seen; I tried to deny it. I blushed so red that I felt the uselessness of my denial. Desgenais smiled.

"Take care!" I said to him; "take care! do not go too far!"

I continued to pace the room like a madman, without knowing what to do; I should have liked to laugh, but that was quite impossible. At the same time, obvious signs taught me my mistake;

I was convinced. "How was I to know?" I said to him; "how was I to know that this wretch—"

Desgenais bit his lips, as if to signify "You knew enough."

I stopped short, every moment muttering some ridiculous phrase. My blood, which had been excited for a quarter of an hour, commenced to beat upon my temples with a force to which I did not respond.

"I was in the street, bathed in tears, and in despair, and during that time the meeting occurred in her rooms! What, even on that night was I jeered at by her, jeered at by her! Really, Desgenais, are you sure you are not dreaming? Is it true, and possible? How do you know?"

Speaking like this, haphazard, I lost my head; and all that time an unsurpassable anger got more and more control over me. At last I sat down exhausted, with trembling hands.

"My friend," Desgenais said to me, "do not take it so seriously. The solitary life you have led for two months has done you much harm; I can see it; you want distraction. Come and sup with us this evening, and lunch to-morrow in the country."

The tone in which he said those words did me more harm than all the rest. I felt that he was pitying me and treating me as a child.

Sitting motionless, apart from them, I made vain efforts to gain control of myself. "What?" I thought, "deceived by this woman, poisoned by horrible advice, finding no refuge either in work or fatigue; when I have as my sole safeguard at twenty against despair and corruption a holy and frightful grief. O God! it is this grief, this sacred relic of my suffering, which has been broken in my hands! My love is no longer

being insulted, but now it is my despair! She jeered while I wept!" It appeared to me to be incredible. All the souvenirs of the past ebbed back into my heart when I thought of it. There seemed to me to rise up, one after the other, spectres of our nights of love; they leant over an abyss, bottomless, eternal, and black as nothingness, and above the depths of the abyss hovered a peal of gentle, mocking laughter: "There is your reward!"

If I had only been told that the world laughed at me, I should have replied: "So much the worse for it," and I should not have been annoyed; but I learnt, at the same time, that my mistress was worthless. So, on the one part, the ridicule was public, proved and vouched for by two witnesses, who, before saying they had seen me, could not fail to mention the occasion: the world was right, and, on the other side, what answer could I make? What could I do, when the centre of my life, my heart itself, was ruined, killed, destroyed? What am I saying? When this woman, for whom I would have dared everything, ridicule as well as blame, for whom I would have allowed a mountain of misery to be heaped upon me; when this woman whom I loved, who loved another, whom I did not ask to love me, and whose permission to weep at her door, and to vow my youth to her recollection, and write her name, and her name only, upon the tomb of my hopes, was all that I desired! Ah, when I thought of it, I felt ready to die; it was this woman who jeered at me; she it was who first pointed me out with her finger to that idle crowd of foolish and bored people, who go away giggling at those who despise and forget them; she it was, those lips which had so many times met mine, that body, that soul of my life, my flesh and my blood, that was the insult;

yes, that was the worst of all, the most cowardly and bitter insult, the pitiless laughter which spits in the face of grief.

The more I buried myself in my thoughts, the more my anger increased. Must I call it anger? for I do not know the name of the sentiment which disturbed me. It is certain that a mad desire for vengeance took possession of me. How could I revenge myself upon a woman? I would have paid any price to have at my disposal a weapon which would wound her. But what was this weapon? I had none, not even the weapon she had employed; I could not reply to her tongue. Suddenly I saw a shadow behind the curtain of the glass door; it was the girl who was waiting in the cupboard.

I had forgotten her. "Listen!" I cried, rising in a transport; "I have loved, I have loved like a madman and a fool. I have deserved all the ridicule possible. But, by Heaven! I must show you something which will prove to you that I am not yet as foolish as you think."

As I said that, I pushed with my foot the glass door, which gave way and showed the girl, who was crouching in a corner.

"Enter," I said to Desgenais; "you, who think me madly in love with a woman, and who only love courtesans yourself, do not let your supreme modesty, which is keeping you there on the couch, prevent you from seeing! Ask her if my whole night was spent beneath any one's windows; she will tell you something. You are going to have a supper-party to-night and a trip into the country to-morrow; I will join you, and will not leave you. We will not separate, we will pass the day together; you shall have foils, cards, dice, punch, or whatever you please, but you shall not go away. Are you with me? agreed! I wished

to make my heart into the mausoleum of my love; but I will cast my love into another tomb, God of justice! even if I have to hollow it in my own heart."

At these words I sat down, while they went into the cabinet, and I experienced how great a feeling of joy can arise from appeased indignation. As for the man who was so astonished at my complete change of life from that day, he did not understand man's heart, and he did not know that it is possible to hesitate for twenty years before taking a step, and then, when the step is taken, not draw back.

CHAPTER II

THE apprenticeship of debauchery is like a vertigo; at first there is a feeling of terror mingled with pleasure, just like the feeling when upon the top of a high tower. While shameful and secret debauchery degrades a man of the most noble instincts, there is some grandeur even for the most depraved in free and bold dissipation, or, as it might be called, open-air debauchery. He who, at nightfall, goes out with carefully concealed face to taint his life incognito, and to secretly shake off the hypocrisy of the day, is like the Italian who strikes his enemy in the back, not daring to provoke him to fight a duel. There is something of the assassin about the man who waits for the

night at the street corners, while he who openly indulges in fierce orgies seems almost like a warrior; there is something about the latter which smacks of battle, of a fierce struggle. "Every one does it, and conceals it; but I do it and do not conceal it." These are the words of pride, and once that cuirass is donned, then the sun glistens upon it.

The legend says that Damocles saw a sword always suspended above his head; so it seems that libertines have above them something which ceaselessly cries out to them: "Go on, go on still; I am hanging by a thread!" Those carriages of masks that we see at Carnival times are the faithful image of their lives. A shabby carriage it is, too, open to the air, with blazing torches lighting up painted faces; some laughing, others singing, others behaving like women, who are, in fact, the remains of women, and almost human in appearance. They are caressed, or insulted, by people who do not know their names or who they are. All these drift along, and stop in the light of the burning resin in an intoxication which thinks of nothing, and over which they say a god watches. They appear at times to be leaning forward and embracing each other, then there is a jolt, and some one falls; what does it matter? they come and go, and the horses go on galloping.

But if the first movement is one of astonishment, the second is of horror, and the third of pity. There is so much strength, or rather such a strange abuse of it, that it often happens that the most noble characters, and the most beautiful organizations often allow themselves to be overwhelmed. It appears to them daring and dangerous, so they become prodigal of themselves, and attach themselves to debauchery, as Mazeppa was attached to the wild horse; they bind themselves,

and become Centaurs, but they do not see the path of blood which the ribbons of their flesh trace upon the trees, nor the eyes of the wolves turning purple as they follow them, nor the desert, nor the ravens.

Launched into this life by the circumstances which I have related, I have now to tell what I found in it.

The first time I saw quite closely those famous assemblies called the masked balls of the theatres, I had heard tell of the debauchery of the Regency, and of a Queen of France disguised as a violet-seller. I found there violet-sellers disguised as vivandières. I expected libertinism, but in reality there was none. It was the debauchery of soot, made up of blows and girls dead drunk upon broken bottles.

The first time I saw debauchery at table I had heard tell of the suppers of Heliogabalus, and of a Greek philosopher who had made the pleasures of the senses a sort of religion of nature. I expected something like oblivion, if not joy; I found there the worst thing in the world, weariness trying to live, and English people who said: "I do this or that and I am amused. I have paid so many pounds, and then I feel so much pleasure." They spend their life upon this grindstone.

The first time I saw courtesans, I had heard tell of Aspasia, who sat upon the knees of Alcibiades while she disputed with Socrates. I expected something forward, insolent but gay, brave and vivacious, something like the sparkle of champagne: I found a gaping mouth, a fixed eye and light-fingered hands.

The first time I saw titled courtesans I had read Boccaccio; I had read Shakespeare, too, and dreamt of those beautiful dashing women, angels of hell, those graceful women of the world to

whom the knights of the *Decameron* presented holy water after mass. I had sketched a thousand times those heads, which were so poetically wild, so ingenious in their audacity, those crazy mistresses who break with you quite unromantically with a leer, and who go through life in waves and jerks, like undulating sirens. I remembered those fairies of the *Cent Nouvelles*, who are always madly in love if they are not intoxicated. I found writers of letters, makers of exact appointments, who could do nothing but lie to strangers, and hide their baseness by their hypocrisy, and who saw in it all nothing more than giving themselves and then forgetting.

The first time I gambled, I had read of waves of gold, of fortunes made in a quarter of an hour, of a nobleman of the court of Henry IV who won, with one card, a hundred thousand crowns, the value of his dress. I found a wardrobe shop where workmen who only have a shirt hire a suit for twenty sous the evening, gendarmes sitting at the door, and the starving playing for a meal against a pistol-shot.

The first time I saw an assembly, public or not, open to some of the thirty thousand who have permission to offer themselves for sale in Paris, I had heard tell of the Saturnalia of all ages, of all possible orgies, from Babylon to Rome, from the temples of Priapus to the Parc-aux-Cerfs, and I had always seen written upon the door one word only : "Pleasure." Here I found but one other word : "Prostitution"; but I still saw that it was ineffaceable, though not engraved in that proud metal bearing the colour of the sun, but in silver, the palest of them all, which the cold light of the night seems to have tinted with its pallid rays.

The first time I saw the people was one fright-

ful Ash Wednesday morning at the Courtille Hill. Since the previous evening a fine, cold rain had been falling, and the streets were pools of mud. The carriages of the masks defiled pell-mell, jostling one another between two long rows of hideous men and women standing on the pavements. This wall of sinister spectators had in their eyes, red with wine, a look of tigerish hatred. For the distance of a league the crowd muttered as the wheels of the carriages grazed their breasts if they did not take a step backwards. I was upright upon the seat of an open carriage; from time to time a man in rags would step from the crowd and hurl a torrent of abuse in our faces, and then throw a handful of flour at us. Soon we received mud; but we went gaily up to the Ile d'Amour and the pretty wood of Domainville, where so many sweet kisses used to be exchanged upon the grass. One of my friends, who was sitting upon the box, fell upon the pavement, and might have killed himself. The people rushed at him to beat him, so we had to surround him. One of the trumpeters who was riding in front of us on horseback was hit on the shoulder by a stone: the supply of flour must have run short. I had heard till now of nothing of that sort. I began to understand the century, and to know the days in which we were living.

CHAPTER III

DESGENAIS had arranged at his country house a gathering of young people. The best wines, a splendid table, play, dancing, racing, were all provided; there was nothing lacking. His old-time hospitality was joined to up-to-date habits. Besides, he had the best books, and his conversation was that of a clever and well-read man. He was a real problem.

When I went to his country house I was in a taciturn frame of mind, which nothing could overcome; he respected it scrupulously. I did not reply to his questions, so he did not ask me any more; the important thing, as far as he was concerned, was that I had forgotten my mistress. However, I went hunting, and at the table showed myself to be as good a guest as the others, so he did not expect anything more.

There are in the world people like him, who go out of the way to render you a service, and who would throw the largest possible stone at you without remorse to crush the fly that is stinging you. Their only anxiety is to prevent you from doing wrong, and they have no rest till they have made you like themselves. When they have gained their object, by any possible means, they rub their hands, and the idea never enters their head that you may have fallen into a worse evil; they do all this through friendship.

It is one of an inexperienced youth's great misfortunes to picture the world to be like the first objects that strike him; but there is, too, we must admit, a very unfortunate race of people who are always ready, under those circumstances, to say to the youth: " You are right to think of evil,

and we know what it is." For example, I have heard tell of something singular: it was like something midway between good and evil, a certain arrangement between heartless women and men worthy of them; they called it the passing sentiment. They spoke of it as of a steam engine invented by an engineer or builder. They said to me: "We agree with this or that, we say certain phrases, to which the reply is certain other phrases, we write letters in a certain way, and kneel down, too, in a certain way." It was all regulated like a drill, and these fine people had grey hair.

It made me laugh. Unfortunately for myself, I cannot tell a woman, whom I despise, that I love her, even when I know that it is merely a convention, and that she will not be deceived. I have never put my knee upon the ground without laying my heart there too. So this class of women, called facile, is unknown to me; or, if I have been ensnared by one of them, it is without knowing, and from simplicity.

I understand a man putting his soul on one side. It is possible that there may be a certain amount of pride in talking of it, but I neither understand boasting nor self-deprecation. I hate every woman who laughs at love, and allows herself to offer it to me; there will never be any dispute between us.

These women are lower than courtesans; courtesans can lie, so can these women; but courtesans can love as well, and these women cannot. I remember a woman who loved me, who said to the man with whom she lived, who was three times as wealthy as I: "You bore me; I am going to my lover." This girl was worth a great deal more than many who are not paid.

I passed the entire season with Desgenais, and

learnt that my mistress had left France; this news gave me a feeling of languor in my heart which never left me.

The aspect of this world, so new to me, which surrounded me in the country, caused me at first a feeling of strange curiosity, sad and deep, which made me look askance at it, as at a skittish horse. This is the first thing which took place.

Desgenais then had a very beautiful mistress, who loved him very much. One evening, as I was walking with him, I told him that I thought her what she really was, admirable as much for her beauty as for her attachment to him. In short, I warmly praised her, and gave him to understand that he ought to consider himself fortunate.

He made me no answer. That was his way, and I knew him to be the most curt of men. At night, after I had been in bed a quarter of an hour, I heard a knock at my door. I called out: "Come in," believing it to be some one who could not sleep.

A woman, half-naked and as pale as death, entered with a bouquet in her hand. She came to me and gave me the bouquet; a small piece of paper was fastened to it, on which these few words were written: "To Octave, from his friend Desgenais, as a compensation."

I had no sooner read it than a light burst upon me. I understood all there was in this action of Desgenais, in sending me his mistress thus, making me a kind of Turkish present, because of the few words I had spoken to him. In his character I knew there was neither ostentatious generosity, nor a trait of trickery; it was a lesson. This woman loved him; I had praised her to him, and he desired to teach me not to love her, whether I accepted or refused her.

That made me think; the poor girl wept, and dare not dry her tears, for fear I should see her do so. How must he have threatened her to make her come? I could not guess. "Made-moiselle," I said to her, "do not be annoyed. Return to your own room, and don't be afraid." She answered me that if she left my room before the following morning Desgenais would send her back to Paris; that her mother was poor, and she could not make up her mind what to do. "Very well," I said to her, "your mother is poor, and so are you, probably, so that you would obey Desgenais if I wished you to do so. You are beautiful, and that might tempt me. But you are weeping, and your tears not being for me, I have nothing more to do with it. Go away; I will take care you are not sent back to Paris to-morrow."

One thing which is peculiar to me is that meditation, usually such a firm and constant quality of the mind, is with me only an instinct independent of my will, which seizes me in attacks like a violent passion. It overtakes me at intervals, at its own time and place, in spite of myself. But whenever it seizes me I cannot resist it. It drags me whither and by what path it pleases.

As soon as the woman had gone, I took a seat. "Friend," I said to myself, "this is what God sends you. If Desgenais had not offered you his mistress, he would not have been wrong; perhaps, in thinking that you would have become enamoured of her.

"Have you looked well at her? A sublime and divine mystery was accomplished in the woman who conceived her. Such a being costs nature her most vigilant maternal regards; but the man who wishes to cure you has found no better way to do so than to force you upon her lips to make you forget your love.

"How has it happened? Others, without doubt, have admired her, but they ran no risk; she could try on them all the seductions she wished, but they were in no danger; you alone were in danger.

"This man Desgenais, however, whatever his life may be, must have a heart, as he is alive. In what way does he differ from you? He is a man who believes in nothing, fears nothing, who has no care, no weariness, perhaps, and it is clear that a slight prick in the heel would fill him with terror; for if his body abandoned him, what would he become? His body is the only thing which lives in him. What is this creature, then, who treats his soul as flagellants do their flesh? Can one live without a head?

"Think of that. Here is a man who holds the most beautiful woman in the world in his arms; he is young and ardent; he thinks she is beautiful and tells her so; she replies that she loves him. Then some one taps him on the shoulder and says: 'She is a courtesan'; nothing more. He is sure of her. If some one had said: 'She is a poisoner,' he would have perhaps loved her; he would not have given her a kiss less; but she is a courtesan, and it is no more a question of love than the star of Saturn.

"What is this word, then? a just, deserved, positive and withering word. But still only a word. Do you kill a body with a word?

"But if you love this body? It is as if some one pours you out a glass of wine, and says to you: 'Do not care about that, you can get four bottles for six francs.' But if you get drunk?"

Desgenais loves his mistress because he pays her; perhaps he has a kind of love peculiar to himself? No, he has not; his manner of loving is not love, and he does not feel any more love

for the woman who deserves it than for the one who is unworthy of it. He simply does not love any one.

What has brought this about, then? Was he born like this, or has he become so? Love is as natural as eating and drinking. He is not a man. Is he an abortion, or a giant? What, is he always certain of his impassive body, even to throwing himself without danger into the arms of a woman who loves him? What, can he do so without turning pale? Does he, then, never give anything in exchange for flesh except gold? What a feast his life must be, and what beverages can he drink! At thirty he is like old Mithridates; vipers' poison is his familiar friend.

"There is a great secret, my friend; a solution to it all. Certain arguments can be made to prove that debauchery is natural one day, one hour, this evening, but not to-morrow, nor every day. There is no race upon earth which has not considered woman as either man's companion and consolation, or as the sacred instrument of his life, and honoured her under these two forms. But here is a bold warrior who leaps into the abyss which God has hollowed out with His hands between man and the animals; he might as well renounce the power of speech. What mute Titan, then, is this who dares to drive back under the kisses of the flesh the love of thought, who places upon his lips the brand which makes the brute, the seal of eternal silence?

"There is a little to be known of him. It is whispered in the breeze of those mournful forests which are called secret corporations, and is one of those mysteries which the angels of destruction whisper in each other's ears when night descends upon the earth. This man is worse or better than God has made him. His entrails are

like those of a barren woman, or nature has only half formed them, or some venomous herb has been distilled in them.

"Ah, well, neither work nor study have cured you, my friend. Forget, and learn, that is your motto. You turned over the leaves of dead books; you are too young for the ruins. Look around you; the pale crowd of men surround you. The eyes of the Sphinx sparkle in the midst of divine hieroglyphics; read the book of life! Courage, scholar; hurl yourself into the Styx, and let its dark waves take you to death, or to God."

CHAPTER IV

"THE only good thing in it, if such a thing were possible, is that these false pleasures were the seeds of sorrow and bitterness, which wore me out." These are the simple words, concerning his youth, of the most manly man who has ever lived, St. Augustine. Of those who have done as he did, few could say these words, though they all have them in their hearts; they are the only words I have in my heart.

Returning to Paris in December, after the season was over, I passed the winter in pleasure, in masquerades and suppers, almost always in the company of Desgenais, who was delighted with me, though I was scarcely as delighted with him. The more I went about, the more anxiety I felt. It seemed to me that this strange world, which at

first had seemed to me to be an abyss, contracted, so to speak, at every step; where I thought I saw a spectre as I approached, I could only see a shadow.

Desgenais asked me what was the matter. "What is the matter with you?" I replied; "are you reminded of a dead friend, or does the damp make some old wound of yours reopen?"

Then sometimes he seemed to listen to me without making any reply. We would take our places at a table, and drink ourselves mad; in the middle of the night we would take post horses and go ten or twelve leagues into the country to breakfast. On our return, after a bath, we dined, spent the evening in play, and then went to bed; but when I got to the edge of my bed, I turned the key in the door, fell upon my knees and wept. It was my evening prayer.

Strange to say, I took great pride in passing as something which I was not at all; I boasted of doing things I did not do, and found strange pleasure, mixed with sadness, in this boasting. When I had really done what I was narrating, I felt nothing but weariness; but when I was inventing some foolish exploit, such as a story of a debauch, or of an orgie at which I had not been present, I seemed, for some reason, to be much more pleased with myself.

I suffered most when on one of our jaunts we went to some place on the outskirts of Paris where I had been with my mistress. I became stupid; I wandered away by myself, and gazed at the bushes and tree trunks with such bitterness, that I could have trampled them in the dust. Then I returned, muttering a hundred times between my teeth: "God does not love me; God does not love me!" After that I remained for hours without speaking.

The fatal idea that truth is nudity returned to me with regard to everything. "The world," I said, "calls its tinsel virtue, its chaplets religion, and its trailing mantle propriety. Honour and morality are its waiting-women; it drinks in its wine the tears of the poor in spirit who believe in it; it walks with downcast eyes as long as the sun is high in the heavens; it goes to church, to balls and parties, but when night descends it unfastens its robe, and there appears a Bacchante with the feet of a stag."

In talking like this I became horrified at myself; for I felt that if the body was beneath the garments, the skeleton was beneath the body. "Is it possible that is all?" I asked myself in spite of myself. Then I returned to the city, and met on the way a pretty girl holding her mother's arm. I followed her with my eyes with a sigh, and became like a child again.

Although I had acquired with my friends daily habits, and we had regulated our licentiousness, I did not give up going into society. The sight of women caused me terrible suffering; I could not touch a woman with my hand without trembling. My lot was to love no more.

But one evening I returned from a ball so sick at heart that I felt it must be love. I had sat at supper near a woman who was more charming and distinguished than any woman I had ever met. When I closed my eyes to sleep, I could see her before me. I thought that I was lost. I decided never to meet her again, and to avoid all places where I knew she visited. That sort of fever lasted for a fortnight, during which time I remained almost entirely lying upon my couch, recalling, in spite of myself, countless times all the commonplaces I had exchanged with her.

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As there is no place in the world where people

are so concerned with their neighbours as in Paris, it was not long before people of my acquaintance, who had seen me with Desgenais, declared that I was a great libertine. In that I admired the intelligence of the world; at the time of my rupture with my mistress I was looked upon as just such a ninny and novice as now I was declared to be a hardened and insensible rake. People came to tell me that it was quite certain that I had never loved that woman, and that I was playing a game of love, and in so doing they considered they were bestowing upon me great praise; and the worst of all was that I was puffed out with such miserable vanity that it charmed me.

My ambition was to pass as *blasé*, but, at the same time, I was full of desires, and my exalted imagination carried me beyond all limits. I began to say that I took no account of women; my head became exhausted by chimeras, which I said I preferred to reality. At last my only pleasure was to misrepresent myself. It was sufficient for a thought to be extraordinary, to clash with common-sense, for me to become its champion, running the risk of advocating the most blamable ideas.

My greatest failing was the imitation of everything which struck me, not because of its beauty, but on account of its strangeness, and not wishing to appear an imitator, I lost myself in exaggeration in my endeavours to appear original. To my taste nothing was good, or even passable; nothing was worth the trouble of turning my head; but when I warmed to an argument it seemed to me that there were no expressions in the French language bombastic enough to praise what I was upholding; but if any one sided with me, all my interest evaporated.

It was the natural sequel to my conduct. Disgusted though I was with the life I led, yet I did not wish to change it. So I tormented my mind to provide change, and I fell into all sorts of eccentricity to escape from myself.

But while my vanity was occupied in this way, my heart suffered so much that there was almost always in me one man who laughed and another who wept. It was like a continual rebound from my head to my heart. My own jests sometimes caused me extreme pain, and my greatest sorrows made me desire to burst out laughing.

A man one day boasted that he was inaccessible to superstitious fear, and was afraid of nothing; his friends put into his bed a human skeleton, and then hid in a neighbouring room to watch him when he returned. They heard no sound, but the next day, when they entered his room, they found him sitting upon a chair playing with the bones; he had lost his reason.

I was something like this man, except that my favourite bones were from a skeleton I had loved; they were the débris of my love, all that remained of the past.

I do not mean to say that in all the debauchery there were no good times. The friends of Desgenais were young men of distinction, many of whom were artists. We sometimes spent delightful evenings together, under the pretext that they were licentious. One of them was enamoured of a beautiful singer, who charmed us with her fresh, melancholy voice. Many a time we sat in a circle listening to her while the table was laid! Many a time one of us, when the glasses were empty, held in his hand a volume of Lamartine, and read aloud in a voice full of emotion! How every other thought used to vanish! The hours flew

by, and, when we sat down to table, what curious libertines we made; we did not speak a word, but had tears in our eyes.

Desgenais, in particular, who was usually the coldest and curtest of men, on these occasions was incredible, for he gave utterance to such extraordinary ideas that he might have been likened to a poet in delirium. But after these extravagances he was seized with furious joy. He broke everything when the wine had excited him; the genius of destruction emerged from him armed to the teeth; I have sometimes seen him in the midst of his folly hurl a chair at a closed window with a frightful crash.

I could not help making a study of this strange man. He appeared to me to be the type of a class of people who must exist somewhere, but were unknown to me. It was impossible to tell in his case whether it was the despair of a disease, or the whim of a spoilt child.

On fête days he was always in a state of nervous excitement, which led him to behave like a regular school-boy. His coolness was then most laughable. He persuaded me to go out with him one day on foot at dusk, clad in grotesque costumes, with masks and musical instruments. We walked about like that all night in the midst of the most horrible uproar. We found a driver asleep upon the box, so we unharnessed his horses; after which, pretending we had just come from a ball, we hailed him loudly. The driver woke up, and, at the first stroke of the whip, the horses went off at a trot, leaving him sitting still upon the box. The same evening we were at the Champs Elysées. Desgenais, seeing another carriage passing, stopped it, neither more nor less than as a thief. He frightened the driver by his threats, made him get off his box and lie down on his face. It was

I ask you, what could I do with a poor seamstress, who was eighteen years old, and pretty, and, consequently, had desires; she had a novel on her counter which was all about love. She knew very little, had no idea of morality, spent her time sewing at a window, past which processions no longer went, by order of the police, but past which, every evening, a dozen licensed women, who were recognized by the same police, roamed. What could I do when, after wearying her hands and eyes for the whole of the day over a dress or a hat, she leant her elbows upon the window-sill for a few minutes as it was getting dark? The dress she had sewn, and the hat she had designed with her poor and honest hands, to earn enough for her supper at home, she saw pass by upon the head and body of a public woman. Thirty times a day a hired carriage used to stop at the door, from which a prostitute, numbered like the carriage, descended and tried on with a disdainful air in front of a glass, put on and took off a dozen times the work of the sad, patient worker. She saw this woman take from her purse six gold coins, while she only earned one in a week. She examined her from head to foot, had a good look at her clothes, and followed her to her carriage; and then what can you expect? One evening, when it is very dark, and work is scarce, and her mother is ill, she half-opens her door, stretches out her hand and stops a passer-by.

Such was the story of a girl I knew. She could play the piano a little, count a little, draw a little, had a slight knowledge of history and grammar; in fact, knew a little of everything. How many times have I gazed with fierce compassion at this caricature of nature, mutilated by society! How many times have I followed through this utter

darkness the pale and flickering light of a suffering and abortive spark! How many times have I tried to kindle a few extinct ashes beneath this poor cinder! Alas! her long hair was the colour of ashes, so we called her Cinderella.

I was not wealthy enough to provide her with masters to instruct her; Desgenais took an interest in this creature, and he made her learn over again those subjects of which she had a smattering of knowledge. But she never could make any real progress; as soon as her teacher had gone, she folded her arms and remained in that attitude for hours together, looking out of the window. What days! what misery! I threatened her one day to leave her without money if she did not work; she went to work silently, and I some time afterwards learned that she went out on the quiet. Where did she go? God knows. I begged her, before she went, to embroider a purse for me; I kept this sad relic for a long time; it was hung up as one of my most sombre relics of the ruins here below.

Here is another experience:

It was about ten in the evening when, after a day of noise and fatigue, we returned to Desgenais's house, where he had preceded us by an hour or two to make preparations. The orchestra was playing, and the room full of people when we arrived.

Most of the dancers were chorus girls; it was explained to me why they were better than others: because there is quite a scramble for them.

As soon as I entered the room I joined in a valse. This really delightful exercise has always been a favourite with me; I know nothing more noble or more dignified for a beautiful woman and young man; all other dances, compared to it, are merely insipid conventions, or pretexts for

100 A Modern Man's Confession

the most insignificant embraces. It is to some extent possessing a woman to hold her for half-an-hour in your arms, and to drag her thus, quivering in spite of herself. It is not without some risk, too; for you can hardly say whether you are protecting her or forcing her. Some, then, give themselves with such voluptuous shame, with such gentle and pure surrender, that you hardly know whether with them you feel desire or fear, and if in pressing them to your heart you will swoon or break them like reeds. Germany, where this dance was invented, is indeed a country where love exists.

I held in my arms a superb dancer from an Italian theatre, who had come to Paris for the carnival; she was wearing the costume of a Bacchante, with a dress of panther's skin. I had never seen such a languishing creature. She was tall and slender, and while valsing with extreme rapidity, she yet had the appearance of dragging herself along; to look at her, you would have said that she would fatigue her partner; but I did not feel any fatigue, for she moved as if by enchantment.

She wore at her breast an enormous spray, the scent of which intoxicated me in spite of myself. At the least movement of my arms I felt her bend like an Indian liana. She was full of such sweet and sympathetic softness, that it seemed just as if she surrounded me with a veil of perfumed silk. At each turn I could just hear the gentle clash of her necklace against her metal girdle; she moved so divinely that I thought I was looking at a beautiful swan, and all the time she wore the smile of a fairy about to fly away. The music of the valse, tender and voluptuous as it was, seemed to come from her lips, while her head, covered with a forest of black, plaited tresses, leant backward, as if her throat was too weak to sustain it.

When the valse was over, I dropped into a chair in the recesses of a boudoir; my heart beat quickly, I was beside myself! "O God!" I cried; "how is it possible? O superb monster! O beautiful reptile! how you clasp, how you undulate, gentle snake, with your supple and speckled skin! How your cousin, the serpent, has taught you to coil round the tree of life with the apple in your lips! O Melusina, O Melusina! men's hearts are your property. You know it well, Enchantress, with your air of gentle languor which does not even seem to suspect it! You know very well you love, you know very well you drown, but you know any one will suffer after touching you; you know that men die from your smiles, from the perfume of your flowers, and from the contact of your voluptuousness: that is why you surrender yourself with such delicacy; that is why your smile is so sweet, your flowers so fresh; that is why you so gently place your arm around our shoulders. O God! O God! what do you desire of us?"

Professor Hallé has produced a terrible sentence: "Woman is the nervous part of humanity, and man the muscular part." Humboldt himself, the serious savant, has said that around the human nerves there was an invisible atmosphere. I am not speaking of the dreamers who follow the turning flight of the bats of Spallanzani, and who think they have discovered a sixth sense in Nature. Such as Nature is, her mysteries are redoubtable enough, her powers are redoubtable enough, for she creates us, jeers at us and kills us without increasing the darkness which surrounds us. But what is the man who believes he has lived if he denies woman's power? What is he if he has never left a beautiful dancer with trembling hands, if he has never felt that inde-

finable and enervating magnetism which, in the midst of a ball, at the sound of the musical instruments, and in the heat, proceeds little by little from a young woman, electrifies herself, and floats around her as the perfume of aloes does around the swinging censer?

I was overcome by a profound stupor. It was not new to me that such an intoxication exists when one is in love: I knew the halo which surrounds the head of the beloved. But she succeeded in exciting these heart beats, and evoking these phantoms with only her beauty, her flowers and the speckled skin of a wild beast, with certain movements, a particular way of turning in a circle which she had learned from some mountebank, and with the contours of a beautiful arm; and she did this without a word or a thought, and without appearing to know it! What, then, was chaos, if this was the work of seven days?

It was not, however, love that I felt, and I can call it by no other name than thirst. For the first time in my life I felt vibrate in my being a strange string at my heart. The sight of this beautiful animal had made another roar in my entrails. I felt that I should not have said to this woman that I loved her, nor that she pleased me, nor even that she was beautiful; there was nothing on my lips but the desire to kiss her and say to her: "Make a girdle for me of those heedless arms; lean that drooping head upon me; plant that sweet smile upon my mouth." My body loved her body; I was overcome with her beauty as if it were wine.

Desgenais passed, and asked me what I was doing there. "Who is that woman?" I asked him.

He replied: "What woman? Whom do you mean?"

I took him by the arm and led him into the ballroom. The Italian saw us approach. She smiled, I stepped back.

"Ah! ah!" said Desgenais; "you have valed with Marco."

"Who is Marco?" I asked him.

"Ah! she is the idler smiling there; does she please you?"

"No," I replied; "I valed with her, and desired to know her name; she does not please me in another way."

Shame made me speak like that; but when Desgenais left me, I ran after him.

"You are very quick!" he said, with a laugh. "Marco is not an ordinary girl; she is under the protection of, and almost married to, M. de —, the ambassador at Milan. One of his friends introduced me to her. But," he added, "I am going to speak to her; we will not let you die if we can possibly help it. He may leave her here to supper."

He went away; I felt great anxiety as I watched him approach her; but I could not follow them, and they were soon lost in the crowd.

"Is it true, then?" I said to myself. "Should I find it there?" When, in an instant: "O God! would she be there whom I am going to love? But after all," I thought, "my senses are disturbed; my heart is of some account too."

I thought I would quiet myself thus. But a few minutes later Dèsgenais tapped me on the shoulder. "We will have supper at once," he said; "give your arm to Marco; she knows she has pleased you, and it is arranged."

"Listen," I said to him; "I don't know what I feel. I seem to see Vulcan, with his lame foot, covering Venus with his kisses, though his beard is smoky from his forge. He fixes his bewildered

eyes upon his prey's firm flesh. He concentrates himself in the sight of this woman, his only comfort; he forces himself to laugh with joy, he trembles with happiness; and all the time he thinks of his father Jupiter, who is seated in the heavens."

Desgenais looked at me without replying; he took me by the arm and pulled me. "I am tired," he said to me; "I am sad; the noise is killing me. Let us go to supper; it will refresh us."

The supper was splendid; but I was only present. I could touch nothing; my lips failed me. "What is the matter?" Marco said to me. I remained like a statue, and gazed at her from head to foot in mute astonishment.

She began to laugh, and so did Desgenais, who was watching us from a distance. Before her was a large crystal cup, which reflected from a thousand sparkling facets the light of the lustres, and shone like the prism of the seven colours of the rainbow. She stretched out her nonchalant arm and filled it to the brim with the golden wine of Cyprus, of the sweet wine of the Orient, which, later, I found so bitter upon the deserted strand of Lido. "Come," she said, offering it to me; "it is for you, my friend."

"For both of us," I said to her, offering her the glass in turn. She moistened her lips from it, and I emptied it with a sadness which she seemed to read in my eyes.

"Is it not good?" she asked.

"No," I replied.

"Or perhaps you have a headache?"

"No."

"Are you tired?"

"No."

"Ah, then it is a love sorrow?" As she spoke her eyes became serious. I knew she came from

Naples, and, when speaking of love, her Italian blood unwittingly beat in her heart.

Another piece of folly came then. The wine had begun to warm the guests' heads, and the glasses clinked; even the palest faces began to display that tinge of purple which wine gives them, as if to hide their shame; a confused murmur, like that of the rising tide, sounded now and then; inflamed looks travelled first in one direction and then in another, and finally became vacant stares; I do not know what wind made all these uncertain people in a state of intoxication drift together. A woman got up, like the first wave in a calm sea, the first wave to feel the coming storm rising to announce it; she signed with her hand for silence, emptied her glass at a gulp, and, with the same motion, let down her hair; a wave of golden hair covered her shoulders; she opened her lips and tried to sing a song, but her eyes were half closed. She breathed with difficulty; twice a raucous sound proceeded from her stifled chest; a mortal pallor suddenly spread over her, and she fell back into her chair.

Then an uproar began, and for more than an hour, while the supper still lasted, continued. It was impossible to distinguish anything—laughter, songs, or cries.

"What do you think of it?" Desgenais said to me.

"Nothing," I answered; "I am stopping my ears and watching."

In the midst of this uproar beautiful Marco remained silent, drinking nothing, and quietly leaning upon her bare arm in an idle dream. She seemed neither astonished nor moved. "Would you not like to do as much as they do?" I asked her; "you offered me Cyprus wine just now; will you not taste it yourself?" I poured out for her,

as I said that, a glass full to the brim; she lifted it slowly, drank it at a draught, and resumed her distraught attitude.

The more I observed Marco, the more strange she seemed to me to be; she took no pleasure in anything, but, on the other hand, she was not bored by anything. It appeared to be as difficult to anger her as it was to please her; she did what she was asked to do, but nothing on her own initiative. I thought of the spirit of eternal repose, and I told myself that if that pale statue became a somnambulist, it would be like Marco.

"Are you good or bad?" I said to her; "sad or gay? Have you loved? Do you want to love? Do you love money, pleasure, horses, the country, or dancing? What pleases you? Of what are you dreaming?" To all these questions she smiled the same smile, one without joy or pain, which seemed to say: "What does it matter?" and nothing more.

I put my lips close to hers; she gave me a kiss as distraught and nonchalant as herself, and then raised her handkerchief to her lips.

"Marco," I said to her, "how unfortunate for a man who would love you!"

She fixed her black eyes upon me, then raised them upwards, and putting a finger in the air, with that inimitable Italian gesture, she pronounced softly the great feminine word of her country, "Forse!" *Perhaps.*

The dessert was served; some of the guests had got up; some were smoking, others were playing cards, and only a few remained at table; some of the women were dancing, others were asleep. The orchestra returned; the candles went out, and were replaced by others. I recollect the supper of Petronius, at which the lamps went out while the guests slept, and the slaves entered on tiptoe

and stole the plate. In the midst of it all the songs continued, and three Englishmen—three of those mournful figures of whom the continent is the asylum—continued, in spite of everything, the most sinister ballad which ever came from their native land.

"Come," I said to Marco, "let us go!" She got up and took my arm.

"Till to-morrow!" Desgenais called out as we left the ballroom.

As I approached the residence of Marco my heart beat so violently that I could not speak. I had no idea of such a woman; she experienced neither desire nor disgust, and I did not know what to think when I saw my hand tremble near this motionless being.

Her room was like herself, sombre and voluptuous; an alabaster lamp half lit it. The couches and the sofa were soft like beds, and I think everything was made of wool and silk. On entering I was struck by a strong smell of Turkish pastilles; not those sold in the streets here, but those from Constantinople, which are the most unnerving and dangerous perfume. She rang a bell, and a maid entered. She went with her into her alcove without saying a word to me, and a few minutes later I saw that she was reclining, and leaning upon her elbow, still in that nonchalant posture which had become a habit with her.

I was standing watching her. It was a strange thing, that the more I admired her, and the more beautiful I thought her, the more I felt the desires with which she had inspired me disappear. I do not know if it was a magnetic effect, but her silence and immobility took possession of me. I did as she had done, and lay down upon the sofa facing the alcove, and the chill of death entered into my soul.

The beating of the blood in the arteries is a strange clock, which we only hear tick at night. Man, abandoned then by external objects, falls back upon himself; he hears himself live. In spite of fatigue and sorrow, I could not close my eyes; those of Marco were fixed upon me; we looked at one another in silence and slowly, if I can make use of that expression.

"What are you doing there?" she said at last; "are you not coming near me?"

"Yes, indeed," I replied, "you are very beautiful!"

A feeble sigh sounded like a moan: one of the strings of Marco's harp slackened. I turned my head at the sound, and I saw that the pale tint of the first rays of dawn coloured the windows.

I got up and opened the curtains; a bright light penetrated the room. I approached a window and stood there for a few minutes; the sky was clear and cloudless.

"Will you not come?" Marco repeated. I signed to her to wait a little longer. Prudent reasons had made her choose a place far from the centre of the city; she perhaps, had another suite of apartments, for she sometimes had an at-home. The friends of her lover called upon her, and the room in which we were was doubtless only a place of rendezvous; it looked out upon the Luxembourg, the garden of which lay spread out before my eyes.

As a cork plunged into the water seems uneasy in the hand holding it, and slips between the fingers to rise to the surface, so there was something moving in me which I could neither overcome nor cast off. The view of the avenues of the Luxembourg made my heart leap, and every other thought vanished. Many a time had I played truant, and laid there in the shade upon

one of the hillocks with a good book full of wild poetry! For, alas! those were my childish debauches. The bare trees and the withered grass of the gardens brought back these memories to me. At the age of ten I had walked there with my brother and tutor, throwing bits of bread to the poor chilled birds; there, sitting in a corner, I had watched for hours the little girls playing round the fountain; I had listened to my innocent heart beating to the refrain of their childish songs; there, on my return from college, I had traversed the same avenue a thousand times, lost in a verse of Virgil, and kicking a stone with my foot. "Oh, my youth!" I cried; "my youth!"

I turned round. Marco had gone to sleep, the lamp had gone out, and daylight had changed the appearance of the room entirely: the hangings, which had seemed to me to be of an azure blue, were of a faded greenish tint, and Marco, the beautiful statue lying in the alcove, was as livid as a corpse.

I shuddered in spite of myself; I looked at the alcove, and then at the garden; my head became heavy, and I went and sat at an open desk before another window. I leant upon the desk, and mechanically looked at an open letter which had been left upon it: it contained only a few words. I read these few words several times till I grasped the meaning of them; I was suddenly struck by it, though it was not possible for me to understand it all. I took the paper and read the following, which was badly written:

"She died yesterday, at eleven in the evening. She felt that she was going, so she called me and said: 'Louise, I am going to rejoin my comrade; go to the cupboard and take down the sheet which is hanging on the nail; it is like the other one.' I fell upon my knees, weeping, but she stretched

out her hand, crying out: 'Don't weep, don't weep!' She uttered such a sigh."

The rest of the letter was torn off. I cannot make the effect of this letter upon me clear; I turned over the paper and saw that it was addressed to Marco, and dated the previous evening. "She is dead? Who is dead?" I cried involuntarily, going to the alcove. "Dead! who is dead?"

Marco opened her eyes, she saw me sitting on her bed with the letter in my hand. "It is my mother," she said, "who is dead. Are you not coming near me?"

As she said this she stretched out her hand.

"Ah—"

"Silence!" I said to her; "go to sleep, and leave me here." She turned round and went to sleep again. I looked at her for some time, till I was sure she could not hear me, and then I went out softly.

CHAPTER V

I WAS sitting at the fireside with Desgenais, with the window open; it was one of those early March days which are the harbingers of spring; it had been raining, and a pleasant smell came from the garden.

"What shall we do?" I asked him, "when the spring comes? I feel a desire to travel."

"I shall do," Desgenais replied, "what I did last year; I shall go into the country at the right time."

A Modern Man's Confession III

"What," I replied, "do you do the same thing every year? You begin your year's life again?"

"What should I do?" he replied.

"That is right!" I cried, getting up with a start. "Yes, what should you do? You have well said. Ah, Desgenais, how all that wearies me. Are you never tired of the life you lead?"

"No," he said.

I was standing up before an engraving representing Magdalene in the desert; I clasped my hands involuntarily. "What are you doing?" Desgenais asked me.

"If I were a painter, and wished to depict sadness, I would not paint a dreamy young girl with a book in her hands."

"What is the matter with you this evening?" he said, with a laugh.

"No, really," I continued, "this Magdalene in tears has her breast swollen with hope; this pale and sickly hand upon which she is resting her head is still scented with the perfumes she has poured upon the feet of Christ. Do you not see that in this desert there are thinking people who pray? That is not melancholy."

"It is a woman reading," he answered, in a sharp tone.

"A happy woman," I said, "reading a pleasant book."

Desgenais understood what I meant; he saw that a profound sadness had overcome me. He asked if I had any cause for sorrow. I hesitated at answering him, and I felt my heart breaking.

"But, my dear Octave, if you have a painful subject, do not hesitate to confide in me; speak openly, and you will find a friend in me."

"I know it," I replied; "I have a friend, but my sorrow has no friend."

He pressed me to explain. "Ah, well," I

said, "if I explain, what will be the use, since you can do nothing, nor can I? Is it the bottom of my heart you desire, or only the first word which comes into my head, and an excuse?"

"Be frank with me," he said.

"Ah, well," I replied, "ah, well, Desgenais, you have given me advice at all times and seasons, and I beg you to listen to me, as I have listened to you. You have asked me what I have in my heart, and I am going to tell you."

✓ "Take the first comer and tell him: 'These are people who pass their lives in drinking, riding, laughing, gambling and enjoying every pleasure; no ties bind them; they have what laws they please, and have as many women as they desire; they are rich. No other cares have they, not one. Every day to them is a holiday.' What do you think of it? Unless the man is a strict devotee he will reply that it is human weakness, if he does not answer that it is the greatest imaginable happiness.

"Then take this man into action; put him at table with a woman on either side of him, a glass in his hand, and a handful of gold every morning, and then tell him: 'This is life. While you are sleeping with your mistress your horses are prancing in the stable; while you are cantering your horse along the fashionable promenades, the wine in your cellar is maturing; while you are spending the night drinking, your bankers are increasing your wealth. You have only to express a wish, and your wishes become realities. You are the happiest of men, but take care that one evening you do not drink too much, and that you do not find your body unfit to enjoy it. That would be a great misfortune, for all griefs are consolable except that. You will gallop one beautiful night, perhaps, in the forest with joyous companions;

your horse will make a false step, you will fall into a ditch full of mud, you will run the risk that your comrades, who are full up with wine, in the midst of their joyful shouts do not hear your cries of anguish; take care they do not pass without seeing you, and the noise of their laughter does not die away in the forest while you drag your broken limbs through the darkness. Some evening you will lose a game; Fortune has her bad days. When you return home and sit by your own fireside, take care to tap your forehead, to allow grief to moisten your eyes, and to look everywhere with bitterness as if you are looking for a friend; take care to think all at once in your solitude of those who have a happy home elsewhere under a thatched roof, and go to sleep holding each other by the hand; for, facing you upon your splendid bed will be, as your only confidant, the pale creature who is the lover of your wealth. You will lean upon her to ease your stifled chest, and she will reflect that you are very sad, and that you would be a considerable loss; the tears in your eyes cause her great concern, for they might make her dress look old, and the rings fall from her fingers. Do not mention to her the name of the man who has beaten you this evening, or she may meet him to-morrow and make eyes at him, to your ruin. That is human weakness; are you forced to have it? Are you a man? take care of disgust, it is still an incurable evil; better death than a living disgust of life. Have you a heart? take care of love! it is worse than an evil for a rake, it is a subject of ridicule: rakes pay their mistresses, and the woman who sells herself has only the right to be contemptuous of one man in the world, he who loves her. Have you any passions? take care of your face; it is a shame for a soldier to throw

off his armour, and for a rake to believe in anything; his glory consists in touching nothing except with hands of marble anointed with oil, upon which everything slips. Are you hot-headed? If you wish to live, learn to kill: wine is sometimes the cause of a quarrel. Have you a conscience? take care of your sleep; a rake who repents too late is like a leaking vessel: it can neither turn back nor continue its voyage; the wind cannot propel it, the ocean drags it down, it turns over and disappears. If you have a body, take care of suffering; if you have a soul, take care of despair. Poor fellow, beware of men; as long as you follow the path you are following, you will seem to see an immense plain, upon which, with garlands of flowers, a crowd of dancers disport like the links of a chain; but that is only a faint mirage; those who look downwards know that they are hovering upon a thread of silk above an abyss, and that the abyss engulfs many who fall into it in silence, without causing a ripple. See that your foot does not slip! Nature, herself, feels her divine entrails coil around you; the trees and reeds no longer know you; you have violated the laws of your mother, you are no longer the brother of the foals, and the birds of the fields keep silence when they see you. You are alone! Beware of God! You are alone before Him, standing like a cold statue upon the pedestal of your will. The rain from heaven no longer refreshes you; it threatens you, it belabours you. The passing wind no longer gives you the kiss of life, the holy communion of everything that breathes; it shakes you and makes you stagger. Each woman that you embrace takes from you a spark of your strength, without returning you one of hers; you exhaust yourself with phantoms; where a drop of your sweat falls there springs up one of those

sinister plants which grow in cemeteries. Die! you are the enemy of everything which loves; wither away in your solitude, do not wait for old age; leave no child upon earth, do not perpetuate your corrupted blood; efface yourself like smoke, do not deprive the growing wheat of a ray of sunshine!" "✓

As I uttered these words, I fell upon a couch, with a stream of tears flowing from my eyes. "Ah, Desgenais!" I cried between my sobs, "you did not tell me that. Did you not know? and if you knew it, why did you not tell me?"

But Desgenais had his hands clasped; he was as pale as a sheet, and a large tear rolled down his cheek.

There was silence for a moment. The clock struck; it suddenly occurred to me that it was just a year ago to the day and hour that I discovered that my mistress deceived me.

"Do you hear the clock?" I cried; "do you hear it? I do not know what it is striking now, but it is a terrible hour, and it will count in my life."

I spoke like that in a transport, without being able to unravel what was passing in my mind. But almost at that precise moment a servant rushed into the room; he took my hand, led me aside and said in a whisper: "Sir, I am come to let you know your father is dying; he has been seized with an attack of apoplexy, and the doctors despair of his life."

CHAPTER I

My father lived in the country some distance from Paris. When I arrived I found the doctor waiting at the door. He said: "You are too late; your father would have liked to have seen you for the last time."

I entered and saw my father lying dead. I said to the doctor: "Sir, I beg you, ask every one to retire and leave me here alone; my father had something to tell me and he will do so." At my orders the servants went away. I approached the bed and gently lifted up the shroud from the face of the corpse. As soon as I saw his face, I made haste to kiss it, and then lost consciousness.

When I recovered I heard some one say: "If he asks to, refuse him upon some pretext or another." I understood that they desired to keep me from the corpse, and I pretended that I had not heard. When they saw that I was quiet, they left me. I waited till the house was quiet, and then taking a candle, I made my way to the room where my father lay. I found a young priest there alone, sitting by the bed. "Sir," I said to him, "it is a bold undertaking to dispute with an orphan for the last watch by the side of his father's body. I do not know who can have asked you to do so. Remain in the next room; I will take the responsibility upon myself."

He withdrew. A single candle, standing upon the table, lit up the bed; I sat down in the priest's place, and once more uncovered those familiar

features I should never see again. "What do you desire to tell me, father?" I asked him; "what was your last thought as you watched for your son?"

My father kept a diary, in which he entered everything which took place day by day. This book was upon the table, and I saw that it was open; I approached it and knelt down; upon the open page were these few words: "Good-bye, my son; I love you, and I am dying."

I did not shed a tear nor utter a sob; my throat contracted, and my mouth seemed to be sealed; I looked at my father's body without moving.

He knew the life I had led, and my escapades had more than once been the subject of his complaints, and the cause of his reprimands. I hardly ever saw him without he spoke of my future, my youth and my folly. His advice had often kept me from my evil destiny, and it was of great weight, for his life had been a model, from one end to the other, of virtue, calmness and goodness. I expected that before his death he had desired to see me to try once more to turn me from the path I was pursuing; but death had come too quickly; he had suddenly felt that he could only say one more sentence, and he had said that he loved me.

CHAPTER II

A LITTLE wooden railing enclosed my father's tomb. According to his wish, long ago expressed, he had been buried in the village cemetery. Every day I went there and spent part of the day upon a little seat in the interior of the tomb. The rest of the time I spent alone in the house in which he had died, and I had only one servant.

However great grief the passions may cause, it is impossible to compare the sorrows of life with those of death. My first feeling, when sitting near my father's bed, was that I was an unreasoning and ignorant child, and I can even say that my heart suffered physical pain at his death, and I sometimes stooped down, twisting my hands like a newly-awakened apprentice.

During the first few months I remained in the country, I thought neither of the past nor the future. I did not seem to have lived before that time; my feeling was not one of despair, and was in no way like that furious grief I had suffered; it was not only a languor in all my actions, like fatigue and indifference to everything, but also a poignant bitterness which gnawed at my heart. I held a book in my hand all day, but scarcely ever read, or, to be accurate, I never read, and did not know of what I was dreaming. I had no thoughts; everything in me was silence; I had received such a violent and prolonged blow that I remained like a purely passive being, and there was no reaction in me.

My servant, whose name was Larive, had been very much attached to my father; he was, perhaps, after him, the best man I have ever known. He was the same height as my father, and as he

had no livery, wore the clothes he gave him. He was almost the same age, too; that is, his hair was turning grey, and in the twenty years he had been my father's servant he had acquired some of his manners. While I walked here and there in the dining-room after dinner, I could hear him doing the same in the ante-room; although the door was open, he did not enter, and we did not exchange a word; but from time to time we watched one another weep. The evenings passed in this way, and the sun had long been set before I thought to ask for a light, or he thought to bring one.

Everything in the house had remained in the same state as before, and we had not disturbed even a piece of paper. The great leather couch on which my father used to sit was near the fireplace; his table and books were in their places; I even respected the dust on the furniture, for he would not have the furniture disturbed by its being dusted. This lonely house, inhabited in silence in this most tranquil way, had been discovered by no one. I seemed to think that the walls sometimes looked at me pityingly, when I wore my father's dressing-gown and sat upon his couch. A weak voice seemed to rise up and say: "Where is the father gone? we can see his orphan son."

I received several letters from Paris, to all of which I replied that I desired to pass the summer alone in the country, as my father had been in the habit of doing. I commenced to appreciate the truth that in every evil there is always some good, and that a great sorrow, whatever may be said of it, is a great rest. Whatever the news they bring when envoys of God touch us on the shoulder, they do the good work of awakening us from life, and when they speak every one is silent. Passing sorrows blaspheme and accuse Heaven;

but great sorrow neither accuses nor blasphemers, it listens.

In the morning I spent whole hours contemplating nature. My windows looked out upon a deep valley, in the midst of which the village steeple stood; everywhere was peace and poverty. The appearance of spring, the flowers and bursting leaves, did not produce upon me that sinister effect which is spoken of by the poets, who look upon the contrasts of life as a jest with death. I think that this frivolous idea, if it is not an antithesis to pleasure, in reality only belongs to those hearts which are but half sensitive. The gambler who goes home at daybreak with burning eyes and empty hands, can feel at war with nature, as the torch of a hideous night; but what can the leaves which the father holds out to his crying child, say? The tears of his eyes are the sisters of the dew; the leaves of the willow are tears themselves. It is by looking at the sky, the woods and the meadows that I understand who are the men who think they can console themselves.

Larive had no more thought of consoling me than of consoling himself. At the time of my father's death he was afraid I should sell the house and not take him to Paris with me. I do not know whether he had heard of my past life; he had at first displayed uneasiness, but when he saw me settle down, his first look went straight to my heart. It was one day when I had had a large portrait of my father brought from Paris, and had it placed in the dining-room. When Larive entered to wait upon me, he caught sight of it; he stood uncertain what to do, first looking at the picture and then at me; he had such a look of joy mingled with sorrow that I could not resist it. He seemed to say: "What happiness! we

shall then stop as we are!" I stretched out my hand to him, and he covered it with kisses as he sobbed.

He cared for my grief as if it were the mistress of his own. When in the morning I visited my father's tomb, I found him there watering the flowers; as soon as he saw me he went away and returned to the house. He followed me in my rides; as I was on horseback, while he was on foot, I did not want him; but as soon as I took a hundred steps in the valley, I saw him behind me with his stick in his hand, wiping his brow. I bought for him a cob from a peasant in the neighbourhood, and then the two of us set out to explore the woods.

There were in the village a few well-read people, who often came to the house. My door was closed to them, although I felt regret at doing so; but I could see no one without a feeling of impatience. Shut up in my solitude, I decided after a time to go through my father's papers; Larive brought them to me with pious respect, and un-doing the packets with a trembling hand, he placed them in front of me.

After reading the first few pages I felt a freshness in my heart, like that which gives life to the air around a tranquil lake; the sweet serenity of my father's soul was exhaled like a perfume from the dusty leaves as fast as I turned them over. The diary of his life reappeared before me; I could count day by day the beats of this noble heart. I commenced to enshroud myself in a gentle and profound dream, and in spite of the serious and firm character which everywhere predominated, I discovered an ineffable grace, the peaceful flower of his goodness. While I read, the recollection of his death mingled ceaselessly with the story of his life; I cannot say with what sad-

ness I followed this limpid stream which I had seen fall into the ocean.

"O just man," I cried, "without fear or reproach, what candour there is in your experience! Your devotion to your friends, your divine tenderness to my mother, your admiration for nature, your sublime love of God, those things made up your life; there was no room in your heart for anything else. The virgin snow upon the mountain tops is not purer than was your saintly age; your white hair resembled it. Oh, father, father, give that grey hair to me, for it is younger than my blonde head. Let me live and die like you; I wish to plant upon the earth in which you are sleeping the green branch of my new life; I will water it with my tears, and the God of orphans will let the pious plant grow upon a child's grief, and the memory of an old man."

After reading these papers I put them in order. I then formed a resolution to keep a diary myself; I had it bound just like my father's, and finding out carefully even the most trivial of his occupations, I set myself the task of following his example. So at every hour of the day the striking of the clock brought tears to my eyes: "That is," I said to myself, "what my father used to do at this time; and whether it was reading, walking, or a meal, I never failed. In this way I accustomed myself to a calm and regular life; there was in this exact punctuality an infinite charm for my heart. I went to bed with a comfort which my sorrow rendered more agreeable to me. My father spent much of his time in the garden; the rest of the day he spent in study and walking; which was a just allotment of mental and bodily exercise. At the same time I inherited his charitable ways, and I continued to do for the unfortunate what he himself had done. I began to go

out of my way to look for people who had need of me; there was no lack of them in the valley. Soon I was known to the poor; shall I say it? Yes, I will say so boldly: where the heart is good, sorrow is healthful. For the first time in my life I was happy; God blessed my tears, and sorrow taught me virtue.

CHAPTER III

As I walked one evening along an avenue of lime-trees on the outskirts of the village, I saw a young woman come out of a house which stood by itself. She was very simply dressed, and wore a veil, so that I could not see her face; but her figure and walk seemed so charming that I followed her with my eyes for some time. As she crossed a neighbouring meadow a white kid which was loose in the field ran to her; she patted it and looked around, as if she was looking for a favourite herb to give it. I saw near me a blackberry bush; I gathered a branch and advanced, holding it in my hand. The kid came towards me with hesitating steps and a frightened air; then he stopped, not daring to take the branch from my hand. His mistress made a sign as if to encourage him, but he looked at her with an uneasy look; she took a few steps towards me, put her hand upon the bough, and the kid took it immediately. I bowed to her, and she continued her walk.

When I reached home I asked Larive if he knew who lived in the village at the place I described to him; it was a modest-looking little house, with a garden. He recognized it; the only two occupants of it were an aged woman, who was supposed to be very devout, and a young one whose name was Madam Pierson. She was the lady I had seen. I asked him who she was, and if she visited my father. He replied that she was a widow living a retired life, and he had seen her call upon my father, though very occasionally. He said no more about it, so I went out again and back to the lime-trees, where I sat down upon a seat.

When the kid approached me again a feeling of sadness overtook me. I got up, and, to distract my thoughts, followed with my eyes the path Madam Pierson had taken, and then took it as if I were in a dream, and was soon among the mountains.

It was almost eleven o'clock in the evening when I made up my mind to turn back; as I had walked a long way, I turned aside to a farm I saw, to ask for a cup of milk and a slice of bread. At the same time big rain spots betokened the beginning of a storm, which I wished to avoid. Although there was a light, and I could hear the sound of coming and going, I got no answer to my knocks, so I went to a window to see whether I could see any one.

I saw a large fire burning in the kitchen; the farmer, whom I knew, was sitting near his bed; I knocked at the window to attract his attention. At the same moment the door opened, and I was surprised to see Madam Pierson, whom I recognized at once; she asked who was there.

I was so astonished to see her that she noticed my astonishment. I entered, asking permission

to take shelter there. I could not imagine what she was doing at that hour in a farm almost lost in the country, when a plaintive voice, which proceeded from the bed, made me turn my head, and I saw that the farmer's wife was lying there with the look of death upon her face.

Madam Pierson, who had followed me, sat down opposite the poor man, who appeared overwhelmed with sorrow; she signed to me to be quiet, for the sick woman was asleep. I took a chair and sat down in a corner till the storm was past.

While I stayed there, I saw her get up from time to time, go to the bed and whisper to the farmer. One of the children, whom I sat upon my knee, told me that she had come every evening since her mother had been ill, and that she sometimes stopped all night. She took the place of a Sister of Charity, for there was no one else besides her in the country, and only a very ignorant doctor. "She is Brigitte the Rose," the child whispered to me; "don't you know her?"

"No," I replied; "why do you call her that?" The child replied that he did not know, but perhaps she had been the Rose Queen of the village, and the name had stuck to her.

As Madam Pierson no longer had on her veil, I could see her features distinctly; as soon as the child left me I raised my head. She was near the bed with a cup in her hand, which she was offering to the farmer's wife, who was now awake. She seemed to me to be pale and a little thin, and her hair was of a blonde ash-colour. She was not regularly beautiful. Her large black eyes were fixed upon the sick woman, and the poor creature at the point of death was looking at her. There was in this simple exchange of charity and gratitude an unspeakable beauty.

The rain increased; a profound darkness settled down upon the deserted meadows, which were only illuminated for a moment by the flashes of lightning. The noise of the storm, the moaning wind, the anger of the elements let loose upon the thatched roof, gave to the scene of which I was a witness, by their contrast with the religious silence of the room, more saintliness still, and something like strange grandeur. I looked at the bed, the streaming windows, the thick puffs of smoke blown down the chimney by the tempest, the stupid despondency of the farmer, the superstitious terror of the children, and all this fury attacking a dying woman from the outside; and when, in the midst of all that, I saw the pale, gentle woman going hither and thither on tiptoe, never leaving for a moment her grateful patient, appearing to notice neither the tempest nor our presence nor her own courage, it seemed to me that there was in this quiet labour something more serene than a cloudless sky, and that she was a superhuman creature, who, though surrounded by so much horror, never for a moment doubted the existence of her God.

"Who is this woman?" I asked myself. "Whence does she come? How long has she been here? It must be a long time since they remember her as the Rose Queen of the village. How is it I have never heard speak of her? Does she come alone to this cottage at this time? When one danger no longer calls her, she will seek another! Yes, through storms, through the forests and the mountains she comes and goes, simply dressed and veiled, bearing life where it was lacking, holding the little fragile cup and caressing her pet as she passes. It is with her calm and silent step that she goes to meet death. This was what she was doing in this valley, while

I was leading a dissolute life; without doubt she was born there, and would be buried in a corner of the cemetery near my beloved father. In that way will die this obscure woman, of whom no one speaks, though the children ask: 'Do you not know her?'

I cannot describe what I experienced; I was motionless in a corner, almost afraid to breathe, and it seemed to me that if I tried to help her, that if I had stretched out my hand to save her a step, I should have committed sacrilege and touched the sacred vessels.

The storm lasted for nearly two hours. When it was over, the sick woman, after she had been raised to a sitting position, said that she felt better, and that what she had taken had done her good. The children ran to her bed at once, looking at their mother with big eyes half anxious, half glad, and clinging to Madam Pierson's dress.

"I think so, too," the husband said without moving from his place; "we have had a Mass said, and it was very expensive."

At this clumsy and stupid speech I looked at Madam Pierson; her heavy eyes, her pallor and the attitude of her body showed clearly her fatigue and how the watching exhausted her.

"Ah, poor husband!" said the sick woman, "God will give it back to you."

I could not contain myself any longer; I got up transported by the foolishness of these brutes who returned thanks, for an angel's charity, to the avarice of their priest; I was ready to reproach them with their base ingratitude and to treat them as they deserved. Madam Pierson lifted up one of the children in her arms, and said with a smile: "Kiss your mother; she is saved." I stopped when I heard these words, for never

was the simple content of a happy and benevolent soul depicted with so great clearness upon a sweet face. I could no longer see the look of fatigue nor the pallor; she radiated all the purity of her joy; and she also returned thanks to God. The sick woman was speaking, but what did it matter what she was saying?

But a few minutes later Madam Pierson told the children to wake the farm boy, so that he might escort her home. I stepped forward to offer myself as her escort; I told her that it was useless to wake the boy, as I was returning the same way, and that she would do me great honour by accepting. She asked me if I was not Octave T—. I answered her that I was, and perhaps she remembered my father. It appeared strange to me that this question made her smile; she took my arm gaily and we set out.

CHAPTER IV

WE walked along in silence; the wind had dropped; the trees swayed gently as they shook the rain from their branches. A few flashes of lightning could still be seen in the distance; and the smell of humid verdure rose in the cool atmosphere. The sky soon became clear again and the moon lit up the mountain.

I could not help thinking of the strange chance

"That is an expression which in your mouth can only be a compliment," she said.

"Why?"

"Because you seem to me to be very young."

"It sometimes happens," I replied, "that a man is older than he looks."

"Yes," she answered, with a laugh, "and it also happens that he may be younger than his conversation appears."

"Do you not believe in experience?"

"I know that is the name that most men give to their follies and their sorrows; what can you know at your age?"

"Madam, a man of twenty may have seen more life than a woman of thirty. The liberty which men enjoy leads them more quickly to the heart of things; they run, without obstacles, towards everything which attracts them; they sample everything. As soon as they hope they walk, they go on, they press forward. When they reach the end they turn back; hope has tarried by the way, and happiness has been struck dumb."

As I was saying this, we were at the top of a little hill leading down into the valley; Madam Pierson, urged on by the steep slope, began to run down quickly. Without knowing the reason, I did the same. Without unhooking our arms, we began to run; the slippery grass dragged us on. At last, like two giddy birds, leaping and laughing, we reached the foot of the mountain.

"See," Madam Pierson said, "I was tired just then, but I am not tired any longer. Will you believe me," she added in a charming tone, "and treat your experience in the same way that I treat my fatigue? We have made a rapid journey, and we shall sup with a good appetite."

CHAPTER V

I WENT to see her on the following day. I found her at the piano, and the old aunt was working embroidery at the window. Her little room was full of flowers, the most beautiful sun in the world was shining through her blinds, and a large aviary was by her side.

I expected to find her almost a nun, or at least one of those country women who know nothing of what goes on outside a two-league circle, and who live in a circle from which they never emerge. I confess that those retired existences which are sometimes hidden away in the towns, beneath thousands of unknown roofs, have always frightened me; the air does not seem viable, and in everything which is forgotten on earth there seems to be a little touch of death.

Madam Pierson had upon her table new books and papers; though it is true she hardly ever touched them. In spite of the simplicity of her surroundings, her furniture and habits, there was something fashionable in them, some novelty, something lifelike; she did not mix in society, but it was there all the same. What struck me most in her taste was that there was nothing strange in it, it was only youthful and agreeable. Her conversation displayed her good education; she could speak easily and well upon any subject. Though she appeared to be simple, there was something about her which betokened a depth of feeling; a wide intelligence hovered gently over a simple heart and the habits of a retired life. The sea-gull, which twists in the azure of the skies, hovers in the same way high up in the

clouds above the tuft of grass in which lies its nest.

We talked of literature, music, and nearly of politics. She had spent the winter in Paris; from time to time she touched the skirt of society; what she saw of it served as the theme, and she divined the rest.

What distinguished her more than anything was her gaiety, which, without amounting to joy, was quite unalterable; you could describe her as a flower whose perfume was gaiety.

With her pallor and large black eyes, it was sometimes plain from certain of her words and looks that she had suffered. Something told you that the gentle serenity of her brow was not of this world, but that she had received it from God, and would faithfully bear it back to Him without losing it in spite of men; there were moments when one thought of the careful woman who, when the wind blows, puts her hand in front of the candle.

After I had spent half-an-hour in her room I could not help telling her all I had in my heart. I thought of my past life, my sorrows, my friends and my disappointments; I went here and there leaning over the flowers, smelling their perfume and looking at the sunlight. I begged her to sing, and she willingly did so. While she was doing so I was leaning at the window, watching the birds hopping about. There came into my head a phrase from Montaigne: "I neither love nor esteem sorrow, although the world has undertaken, as if at a fixed price, to honour it with particular favour. They dress wisdom, virtue and conscience in it. It is an ugly and foolish adornment."

"What happiness!" I cried in spite of myself; "what rest! what joy! what oblivion!"

The good aunt lifted her head and looked at me with an astonished air; Madam Pierson stopped short. I became as red as fire, seeing how foolish I had been, and I went and sat down without a word.

We went into the garden. The white kid I had seen the previous evening was asleep upon the grass; he came to her as soon as he saw her and followed us quite familiarly.

At the first turn of the path a tall young man with a pale face wrapped in a kind of cassock appeared suddenly at the gate. He entered without knocking and came to greet Madam Pierson; his face, which appeared to me one of evil augury, clouded somewhat when he saw me. He was a priest, whom I had seen in the village, by name Mercanson; he came from Saint Sulpice, and the priest there was related to him.

He was fat and sallow, two things which always displease me, and which are really disagreeable; it is a contradiction like bad health. Besides, he had a way of speaking slowly and in jerks which showed that he was a pedant. His bearing even, which was neither young nor fresh, offended me; as for his look, it could best be described by saying that he had none. I do not know what to think of a man whose eyes tell me nothing. Those were the signs by which I had judged Mercanson, and unfortunately they did not deceive me.

He sat down upon a seat and began to talk about Paris, which he called the modern Babylon. He came from there, knew every one; he went to the house of Madam de B—, who was an angel; he preached in her drawing-room, and people listened to him on their knees. (The worst of it was that this was true.) One of his friends whom he had taken there, had just been expelled from the College for seducing a girl, which was a very

sad and terrible thing. He paid Madam Pierson a thousand compliments upon the charitable habits she had contracted in the country; he had heard of her benevolence, and the care she took of the sick, even to watching over them in person. It was very beautiful, very pure; he would not fail to speak of it at Saint Sulpice. Did he not seem to say that he would not fail to speak of it to God?

Tired by this discourse, and so that I should not shrug my shoulders, I sat down upon the grass and played with the kid. Mercanson let his dull and lifeless eyes rest upon me: "The celebrated Vergniaud," he said, "had this mania of sitting upon the ground and playing with animals."

"It is a very innocent mania," I replied. "If there were no other kinds, the world could go on alone, without so many people who wish to be mixed up in it."

My answer did not please him; he knitted his brows and spoke of something else. He was charged with a commission: his relation, the village priest, had spoken to him of a poor devil who had no means of earning a living. He lived in such a place; he had been there himself, he was interested in him; he hoped that Madam Pierson—

I watched her all this time and waited for her answer, as if the sound of her voice would cure me from that of this priest. She only made a deep bow and he withdrew.

When he had gone our gaiety returned. We went to a greenhouse at the bottom of the garden.

Madam Pierson treated her flowers as she did her birds and peasants; every one had to be healthy, each one had its share of water and sunshine, so that it could be gay and happy like a

good angel; so nothing was better kept or more charming than the little greenhouse. When we had made a tour of inspection: "Monsieur de T—," she said to me, "this is my little world; you have seen all I possess, and my domain ends here."

"Madam," I replied, "may the name of my father, which obtained me the favour of entry here, allow me to return, and then I shall think that happiness has not quite forsaken me."

She stretched out her hand to me and I touched it respectfully, not daring to raise it to my lips.

In the evening I returned home, shut the door and went to bed. I had before my eyes a little white house; I saw myself going out after dinner, going through the village and along the promenade, and knocking at the gate. "Oh, my poor heart!" I cried; "God be praised! you are still young, you can live, you can love."

CHAPTER VI

ONE evening I was at Madam Pierson's house. Three months had passed, during which I had seen her almost every day; and on this occasion I can only say that I saw her! For Bruyère says: "To be with the people we love is sufficient; to dream, to speak to them, not to speak to them, to think of them, even to think of mere

indifferent matters in their presence is just the same."

I was in love. For three months we had taken long walks together; I was initiated into the mystery of her modest charity; we traversed the dark lanes, she upon her pony, I upon foot with a stick in my hand; in this way, talking part of the time and dreaming the remainder, we went to knock at the cottage doors. There was a little seat on the edge of the wood where I used to wait for her after dinner; we met regularly in this way as if by chance. In the morning we had reading and music, and the evening was spent in cards with her aunt by the fireside, as my father used to do; and wherever she was her face bore a smile, and her presence filled my heart. By what path, Providence, had you led me to misfortune? What irrevocable destiny was I destined to accomplish? What, a life so free, an intimacy so charming, such repose, and the birth of hope! O God! of what do men complain? What is there sweeter than love?

To live, or to feel strongly and deeply that one exists, that one is a man created by God, is the first and greatest benefit of love. There is no doubt that love is an inexplicable mystery. With the chains, misery, and I might almost say the disgust with which the world has surrounded it, buried as it is beneath a mountain of prejudice which distorts and depraves it, through all the filth which it is dragged, love, vivacious and fatal love, is no less as heavenly and incomprehensible a law as that which suspends the sun in the sky. What can be, I ask you, a tie harder and more solid than iron, which we can neither see nor touch? What is it to meet a woman, to look at her, to talk to her, and never forget her? Why should it be that one rather than another? Invoke

reason, habit, sense, the head, or the heart, and explain if you can. You will only find two bodies, one here, the other there, and between them what? air, space, immensity. O mad men, who think yourselves men, and dare to argue about love! Have you experienced it, so that you can speak of it? No; you have never done so. You have exchanged a glance with an unknown who passed by, and suddenly something without a name is given off from you. You have taken root in the ground, like the seed hidden in the grass, which feels life rise in it, and will in time become part of a crop.

We were alone with the window open, and at the bottom of the garden was a little fountain, the sound of which reached us. O God, I would have liked to count drop by drop the water which fell from it while we sat there, as she spoke and I answered her. There I became so infatuated with her that it almost amounted to madness.

It is said that there is nothing so rapid as a feeling of antipathy; but I think that feeling becomes quicker still when people understand and love one another. How priceless then are the smallest words! No matter of what the lips are speaking, when we listen our hearts reply! What infinite sweetness there is in the first glance of a woman who attracts you! At first it seems that everything which is said to one another is like a timid trial, or a small experiment; soon a strange joy is begotten; there is a feeling that an echo has been found, and there is a feeling of animation by a double life. When one is sure of loving, when one has recognized in the person beloved the fraternity sought, what serenity there is in the soul. Speech expires of itself; a person knows what he is about to say beforehand; the souls unbend, the lips keep silence. What

a silence it is, too! what oblivion of everything!

Although my love, which had commenced on the first day, had increased to excess, the respect I had for Madam Pierson had kept me from speaking. If she had admitted me less easily into her intimate acquaintance, I should, perhaps, have been bolder, for she had produced on me such a violent impression that I never left her without transports of love. But there was in her frankness, and in the confidence she displayed in me, something which stopped me; besides, it was on the strength of my father's name that she had treated me as a friend. This consideration rendered me still more respectful to her; I thought it my duty to show her I was worthy of the name.

"Talking of love," some one says, "is making love." We rarely spoke of it. Every time we touched on the subject, in passing, Madam Pierson hardly answered me, and spoke of something else. I did not make out her motive, but it was not prudery; but it sometimes seemed as if her face on these occasions assumed a look of slight severity, and even of suffering. As I had never asked any questions about her past life, and did not desire to do so, I did not mention the subject any more.

On Sunday there was dancing in the village; she almost always went there. On those days her toilette, though still simple, was more elegant; she had a flower in her hair, a gay ribbon and a little jewellery; but there was in her manner a gayer and more unconstrained air. Dancing, which she loved for itself as an amusing exercise, inspired her with playful gaiety; her place was near the little village band; she came skipping and laughing with the country girls, almost all of whom she knew. Once started, she did not stop.

Then she seemed to talk to me with more freedom and unusual familiarity. I did not dance, as I was still in mourning; but I remained behind her, and more than once, seeing her so amiable, I had been tempted to declare my love.

But for some reason, when I thought of it, I felt an invincible dread; the idea of the declaration simply rendered me quite serious in the midst of the utmost gaiety. I sometimes thought of writing to her, but I burned my letters when they were half written.

That evening I had dined with her, and noticed the tranquillity of her household; I thought of my own calm life and my happiness, since I had known her, and I said to myself: "What more? Does not that suffice? Who knows? God has, perhaps, done no more for you. If I told her that I loved her, what would happen? she would, perhaps, prevent me from seeing her. Should I, by telling her, make her happier than she was already? should I be happier myself?"

I was leaning over the piano as I reflected in this way, and a feeling of sadness took possession of me. It was dusk, and she lit a candle; as she sat down again she saw a tear upon my face. "What is the matter?" she said. I turned my head away.

I searched for an excuse, but found none; I was afraid to look her in the face. I got up and went to the window. The breeze was soft, and the moon was rising behind the avenue of limes, where I had first seen her. I fell into the deepest reverie, I even forgot her presence, and, outstretching my arms to heaven, a sob escaped me.

She had got up, and was standing behind me. "What is the matter?" she asked again. I re-

plied that my father's death had been brought back to my mind by the sight of this vast, lonely valley; I wished her good-bye and went out.

I could not account for the reason which had made me decide to remain silent about my love. But instead of returning home, I began to wander like a madman through the village and the woods; I sat down upon a seat I came near, and then got up hurriedly. Towards midnight I approached Madam Pierson's house; she was at the window. When I saw her I began to tremble and wished to retrace my steps; but I seemed to be fascinated, and came slowly and sadly and sat down beneath her.

I do not know whether she recognized me; but after I had been there for a few minutes I heard her soft and clear voice singing the refrain of a ballad, and almost immediately a flower fell upon my shoulder. It was a rose which I had seen that evening upon her breast; I picked it up and raised it to my lips.

"Who is there," she said, "at this hour? Is it you?" She called me by my name.

The garden gate was half open; I got up without answering and went in. I stopped half-way across the lawn; I walked like a somnambulist, without knowing what I was doing.

Suddenly I saw her appear at the door at the top of the steps; she appeared uncertain, and was gazing intently in the moonlight. She took a few steps towards me, and I advanced to meet her. I could not speak; I fell on my knees before her and seized her hand.

"Listen to me," she said; "I know it, but if it has reached this stage, Octave, you must go away. You come here every day; are you not welcome? Is not that enough? What can I do

for you? My friendship is yours; I should like you to have had the strength to allow me to keep yours longer."

CHAPTER VII

MADAM PIERSON, after saying that, remained silent, as if expecting a reply. As I was overwhelmed with sorrow, she gently withdrew her hand, retired several steps, stopped again, and then slowly went indoors.

I remained upon the lawn. I had expected what she had said; my mind was immediately made up, and I decided to go away. I got up, broken-hearted, but firm in my resolve, and walked round the garden. I gazed at the house and her chamber window; I closed the gate after me as I went out, and put my lips to the lock.

As soon as I got home I told Larive to prepare what was necessary, as I was going away at day-break. The poor fellow was astonished, but I signed to him to obey without asking questions. He brought a large trunk, and we began to pack.

It was five o'clock in the morning, and the day was breaking, when I asked myself where I was going. At this simple thought, which had not occurred to me before, I felt irresistibly discouraged. I cast my eyes over the country as far as the horizon in each direction; a feeling of great weakness overcame me; I was exhausted

with fatigue. I sat down upon a couch; little by little my ideas became confused; I raised my hand to my forehead, which was heated with pain. A violent fever made my limbs tremble, and I could only drag myself to bed with Larive's assistance. My thoughts were so confused that I could hardly recollect what had taken place. The day passed, and towards evening I heard the sound of music. It was the Sunday for dancing, so I sent Larive to see if Madam Pierson was there. He did not find her, so I sent him to the house; the windows were shut, and the servant told him that her mistress had gone with her aunt to spend a few days with a relative at N——, a small town some distance away. He brought me back a letter which had been given to him. It was as follows :

"I have known you for three months now, and for a month I have noticed that you have conceived for me what is called at your age love. I thought that you had the resolution to conceal it from me, and overcome yourself. I esteemed you, and that would have made me do so more. I have no reproaches to make to you on what has passed, nor on that in which your strength of will has failed you.

"What you think is love, is only desire. I know that many women seek to inspire it; it would be better if they had more self-respect than to try and please those who approach them; but even this vanity is dangerous, so I was wrong to have it in your case.

"I am several years older than you, and I ask you not to see me again. It would be in vain for you to try and forget a moment of weakness; that which has passed between us can neither take place a second time nor be quite forgotten.

"I do not leave you without sorrow; I shall be away for a few days; if on my return I find you have gone away, I shall be sensible of this last mark of esteem and friendship which you have shown me.

"BRIGITTE PIERSON."

CHAPTER VIII

FEVER kept me in bed for a week. As soon as I was well enough I wrote to Madam Pierson that she should be obeyed, and that I was going away. I wrote to her in good faith, and without any design to deceive her; but I was far from keeping my promise. Hardly had I gone two leagues when I stopped the carriage and got out. I began to walk along the road; I could not take my eyes off the village, which I could see in the distance. At last, after a terrible struggle, I decided that it was impossible for me to continue my journey, and, rather than get back into the carriage to do so, I would have died where I stood. I told the postilion to turn, and, instead of going to Paris, as I had said, I went straight to N—, where Madam Pierson was.

I got there at ten o'clock at night. As soon as I alighted at the inn, I had pointed out to me by a boy the house of her relative, and, without reflecting on what I was doing, I went there at once. A servant opened the door, and I asked

her if Madam Pierson was there to tell her that some one from M. Desprez wished to speak to her. That was the name of our village priest.

While the servant was carrying out my request, I remained in a little dark courtyard. As it rained, I went as far as a porch at the bottom of the steps, where there was no light. Madam Pierson soon came, preceding the servant; she came down quickly, without seeing me in the darkness, so I stepped forward and touched her arm. She stepped back with fright and cried: "What do you want?"

Her voice trembled so, and, when the servant came with the light, I saw she was so pale, that I did not know what to think. Was it possible that my unexpected presence had disturbed her to this extent? That idea crossed my mind, but I told myself that it was the movement of natural fright of a woman who suddenly finds herself seized.

But in a calmer voice she repeated her question. "You must," I told her, "let me see you once more. I will go away; I will leave the neighbourhood. You shall be obeyed, I swear to you, to the fullest extent of your wishes; for I will sell my father's house and the rest of the property, and go abroad. But it is only on condition that I see you once more; if I do not, I remain; do not be afraid of me, but I have made up my mind."

She knitted her brows, and gave a strange look from side to side; then she answered me almost graciously: "Come to-morrow during the day; I will see you." She went away at once.

The following day I called at midday. I was shown into a room containing ancient tapestry and old furniture. I found her alone, sitting upon a sofa. I sat down opposite her.

"Madam," I said to her, "I neither come to speak to you of my sufferings, nor to abjure the love I bear for you. You have written that what passed between us could not be forgotten, and it is quite true. But you say that because of that we cannot meet upon the same footing as before, and there you are mistaken. I love you, but I have not offended you; nothing is changed concerning yourself, since you do not love me. If I see you again, there is only myself to answer to you for, and it is my love which does so."

She wished to interrupt me.

"Be good enough to let me finish. No one knows better than I do, in spite of all the respect I bear you, in spite of all the protestations by which I could bind myself, that love is the stronger. I repeat that I am not come to deny what I have in my heart. But, from what you yourself told me, to-day is not the first time you have known that I love you. What reason has prevented me declaring my love to you until now? The fear of losing you; I was afraid that I should no longer be admitted to your house, and that has happened. Lay this condition upon me, that at the first word I speak of it, on the first occasion that a gesture or idea escapes me, which lacks in the slightest degree the most profound respect for you, your door will be closed to me; as I have already been silent, so I will be in future. You think it is only a month that I have loved you; it is from the first time I saw you. When you noticed it, you did not cease to see me on that account. If you esteemed me sufficiently to believe me incapable of offending you, why have I lost that esteem? That is what I have come to ask you. What have I done? I bowed my knee, but I did not say a word. What have I taught you? You knew it already. I was weak because

I suffered. Ah, well, madam, I am twenty, and what I have seen of life has so disgusted me (I could use a stronger word), that there is not upon earth, neither in the society of men, nor even in solitude, a place small and insignificant enough for me to occupy. The space enclosed by the four walls of your garden is the only place in the world where I live; you are the only human being who makes me love God. I had renounced everything, before knowing you; why do you take from me the single ray of the sun which Providence has left me? If it is through fear, how have I made you afraid? If it is out of pity, of what have I been guilty? If it is out of pity, and because I suffer, you are mistaken if you think I can be cured; I could, perhaps, have been cured two months ago; I have preferred to see you and suffer; and, whatever happens, I am not sorry. The only misfortune that can happen to me is to lose you. Put me to the test. If I ever feel there is too much suffering for me in our bargain, I will go away; and you may be quite sure of it, as you are sending me away to-day, and I am quite ready to go. What risk do you run in giving me a month or two longer of the only happiness I shall ever enjoy?"

I waited for her reply. She got up quickly, and then sat down again. She remained silent for a minute. "Be persuaded," she said, "it is not so."

I thought she was searching for expressions which were not too severe, and that she wished to answer me kindly.

"One word more," I said to her as I got up, "and only one. I know who you are, and if you have any compassion for me in your heart, I thank you for it; say one word! this moment decides my life."

She shook her head; I saw her hesitate.

"Do you think I shall get over it?" I cried; "may God leave you that thought, if you drive me away."

As I said these words, I looked at the horizon, and I felt, deep down in my soul, such horrible solitude at the thought that I was going away, that my blood froze. She saw me standing with my eyes fixed upon her, waiting for her to speak; all the forces of my life hung upon her lips.

"Ah, well," she said, "listen to me. This journey you have taken is imprudent; you need not have come here for me; undertake a commission which I will give you, for a friend of my family. If you find it is a good way away, let it be the occasion of your absence for as long as you like, but not for too short a time. What do you think of it?" she added with a smile; "a little travel will calm you. You will stop in the Vosges, and go as far as Strasburg. If you return in a month—or, better still, in two months—to give me an account of your mission, I will see you again, and answer you better."

CHAPTER IX

I RECEIVED from Madam Pierson the same evening a letter addressed to M. R. D. at Strasburg. Three weeks later my mission was accomplished and I was back again.

I had thought of nothing but her during the journey, and I had lost all hope of ever forgetting her. But my undertaking to keep silent in her presence on the subject of love; the danger I had been in of losing her through my imprudence had made me suffer too cruelly for me to run the risk again; my esteem for her did not allow me to think she had not acted in good faith, and I saw nothing like hypocrisy in her attempt to leave the neighbourhood. In a word, I was firmly persuaded that at the first word of love I said to her, her door would be closed to me.

I found her changed and thin. Her habitual smile appeared to languish upon her discoloured lips. She told me she had been ill.

Nothing was said of the past. She appeared to wish to forget it, and I did not desire to speak of it. We soon resumed our neighbourly habits; but there was between us a certain amount of constraint and artificial familiarity. It was just as if we sometimes said : "It was like this before, though it was not just the same then." She gave me her confidence as a kind of reinstatement, which was not without its charms for me. But our talks were colder, for the same reason that our glances were, while we carried on a conversation, full of tact. Nothing could have been guessed from anything that was said. We no longer tried, as in former times, to penetrate one another's mind; and there was not the same interest in each word and each sentiment, that curious appraisement of the past; she treated me with kindness, but I mistrusted her goodness; I walked with her in the garden, but I did not go further than that with her; we no longer explored together the woods and valleys. She opened the piano when we were alone, but the sound of her voice no longer awakened in my heart those

bursts of youth, those transports of joy which are like sobs full of hope. When I left her she always extended her hand to me, but I could feel that it was inanimate; there was much effort in our ease, much reflection in our most trivial conversation, and much sorrow at the root of it all.

We really felt as if there was a third person between us; and that was the love I bore her. Nothing betrayed it in my actions, but it soon appeared upon my face; I lost my gaiety, my strength, and the appearance of health left my cheeks. In less than a month I was quite different from my ordinary self.

In our conversation I always insisted upon my disgust of the world, and upon the aversion I felt for entering it again. I set myself the task of making Madam Pierson feel that she had done nothing with which to reproach herself, when she allowed me to revisit her. Sometimes I depicted to her my past life in its most sombre colours, and gave her to understand that if I were separated from her, I should give myself up to a solitude worse than death; I told her I had a horror of society, and the true story of my life, which I told her, proved to her that I was sincere. Sometimes I affected a gaiety which was far from my heart, to let her know that, in allowing me to see her, she had saved me from the most frightful unhappiness; I thanked her almost every time I visited her for being allowed to go and see her again in the evening, or on the following day. "All my dreams of happiness," I said to her, "all my hopes, all my ambition is enclosed in this little bit of land where you dwell; beyond the air you breathe there is no life for me."

She saw how I suffered, and could not help pitying me. My courage made her pity me, and her pity extended to all her words, and even her

gestures and attitude, when I was there, in a kind of tenderness. She could see the struggle taking place in me; my obedience flattered her pride, but my pale face aroused in her the instinct of a Sister of Mercy. I saw her sometimes excited, almost coquettish; she told me, quite in a sprightly way: "I shall not be at home to-morrow, do not come then." Then, as I was leaving her sadly and resignedly, she suddenly softened; she added: "I don't know, though, come if you like," or else her good-bye was more familiar, and she followed me to the gate with a more gentle and sorrowful look.

"Do not doubt," I said to her, "that Providence has led me to you. If I had not known you, perhaps by this time I should have gone back to my dissolute life. God has sent you, like an angel of light, to draw me from the abyss. It is a holy mission which has been entrusted to you; who knows, if I lost you, where my devouring grief, my baneful experience, young though I am, and the terrible combat between my youth and the enemy would lead me?"

This thought, though really sincere as far as I was concerned, had a great deal more weight with a woman of deep devotion, and a soul as ardent as pious. This was perhaps the only reason that Madam Pierson allowed me to see her.

I was about to go to see her one day, when there was a knock at the door, and Mercanson, the priest I had met in her garden on my first visit, came in. He began by making excuses as tiresome as himself for calling upon me without knowing me; I told him that I knew very well he was the nephew of our priest, and asked him why he had called.

He turned from side to side with an artificial air, picking his phrases, and touching with the

tips of his fingers everything which was upon table, like a man at a loss for something to say; at last he told me that Madam Pierson was ill, and that she had asked him to tell me that could not see me that day.

"She is ill? But when I left her late last evening, she was well enough then."

He bowed to me.

"But, sir, why, if she is ill, did she let know by a third person? She does not live very far away, and a useless walk would have made little difference to me."

Mercanson made the same reply. I could understand this call on his part, much less the errand which brought him.

"Very well," I said to him, "I shall see her to-morrow, and she will explain."

His state of indecision began again: "Madam Pierson has also said—he had to say—he has another message."

"What else?" I cried impatiently.

"Sir, you are violent. I fear that Madam Pierson is seriously ill; she will not be able to see you all the week."

He bowed again and went out.

It was evident that this visit concealed a mystery: either Madam Pierson did not wish to see me (and I did not know to what reason to ascribe it), or Mercanson had interfered on his own responsibility.

I allowed the day to pass; but the next morning I was at her gate, where I met the servant; she said that her mistress was seriously ill, and, though I would, she could not be persuaded either to take the money I offered her, or answer my questions.

As I returned to the village, I saw Mercanson on the way; he was surrounded by school chil-

dren, to whom his uncle was giving a lesson. I approached him in the middle of his address, and begged him to let me have a word with him.

He followed me; but it was now my turn to hesitate, for I did not know the way to approach him to extract his secret from him. "Sir," I said to him, "I beg you to inform me whether what you told me yesterday was true, or was there some other motive for telling it to me? Besides, there is no doctor in this part of the country who can be called in; I have reasons of great importance for asking you."

He defended himself in every way, pretending that Madam Pierson was ill, and that he knew nothing more, except that she had sent him to see me and let me know, as he had done. As we were talking, we had reached a deserted spot in the road. Seeing that neither artifice nor entreaty was of any use, I turned suddenly and seized his arms.

"What do you mean, sir? Do you mean to use violence?"

"No, but I want you to tell me."

"Sir, I am afraid of no one, and I have told you all that it was my duty to tell you."

"You have told me what it was your duty to tell me, not what you know. Madam Pierson is not ill; I know it, I am sure of it."

"How do you know?"

"The servant has told me. Why has she closed her door against me? why has she sent you to me?"

Mercanson saw a peasant passing. "Pierre," he called out his name, "wait for me; I want to speak to you."

The peasant approached; it was all that he wanted, thinking that before a third person I should not dare to illtreat him. I let him go,

but did it so roughly, that he fell back and his back struck a tree. He clenched his fist and went away without another word.

I spent the week in a state of extreme agitation, calling three times a day on Madam Piereson, and being always refused admission. I received a letter from her; she told me that my assiduity was the talk of the countryside, and begged me to make my visits less frequent in future. There was not a word about Mercanson or her illness.

This precaution was so unnatural, and contrasted in such a strange way with the proud indifference she usually showed for talk of this kind, that I could hardly believe it, not knowing, however, any other interpretation to place upon it. I replied that the only thing I had in my heart was obedience to her. But, in spite of myself, the expressions I used displayed some bitterness.

I even put off the day upon which I was to go and see her, and did not send to inquire after her, to convince her I did not believe in her illness. I had no idea why she had banished me thus; but I was so utterly miserable that I sometimes seriously thought of putting an end to my unbearable life. I spent whole days in the woods, and chance one day caused her to meet me in a pitiable state.

I hardly had the courage to ask her for an explanation; she did not answer me frankly, so I did not return to the subject. I was reduced to counting the days I spent without her, and living for weeks upon the hope of a visit. Every moment I felt a desire to fall upon my knees and depict my despair to her. I told myself she could not be insensible to it, that she would at least recompense me with a few words of pity; but then her abrupt departure and severity came back to

me; I trembled at the thought of losing her, and I preferred to die rather than to run the risk.

So, not even having permission to confess my sorrow, my health completely broke down. My feet could hardly bear me to see her; I felt I should exhaust the spring of my tears there, and each visit cost me more; it was a parting every time as if I should not see her again.

She did not adopt the same tone or display the same ease as formerly; she spoke of travelling; she affected to confide lightly in me with regard to ideas which occurred to her, she said, of leaving the country, and made me feel more dead than alive when I heard about them. If she allowed a natural movement to escape her, she rejected it immediately with the coldness of despair. One day I was unable to prevent myself from weeping with grief before her at the way she treated me. I saw her grow pale in spite of herself. As I left her, she told me at the door: "I am going to Sainte-Luce to-morrow (a village in the neighbourhood), but it is too far to walk. Come here on horseback early in the morning, if you have nothing to do, and accompany me."

I was there punctually, as you may imagine. I had gone to sleep upon these words with transports of joy; but, when I went out, I experienced quite an opposite feeling of sorrow. In returning to me the privilege I had lost of accompanying her in her lonely walks, she had yielded to a fancy which seemed to me a cruel one if she did not love me. She knew how I suffered; why did she abuse my courage if she had not changed her mind?

This reflection, which occurred to me, made me feel quite differently to what I usually did. When she mounted her horse my heart beat as I held her foot; I do not know whether with desire or anger. "If her heart is touched," I said to myself, "why

trees, in the shade of which animals were grazing; in the distance was a village, consisting of a dozen wooden houses sprinkled here and there among the meadows, and rising on the slopes of the surrounding hills. Upon the first view a young girl, wearing a large straw hat, was sitting at the foot of a tree, and a farm boy, standing in front of her, seemed to be pointing out to her with his iron-tipped stick the road he had traversed; he was indicating a twisting path, which lost itself in the mountains. Above them was the Alps, and the picture was crowned by three peaks covered with snow, tinted by the rays of the setting sun. Nothing could be more simple nor more beautiful than this landscape. The valley resembled a lake of verdure, and the eye followed its contours with the most perfect tranquillity.

"Shall we go there?" I said to Brigitte. I took a pencil and traced some lines upon the picture.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"I am trying," I told her, "to see whether, with a little skill, I can make this figure resemble you. This young girl's pretty hat would suit you well, I think; and if I succeeded, I might make this fine mountaineer look something like me."

This fancy appeared to please her; and setting to work with an eraser, she soon rubbed out the boy's and girl's faces in the picture. I was drawing her picture, and she wished to draw mine. The faces were very small, so it was not a very difficult matter; we agreed that the portraits were good ones, and it was possible to recognize our features in them. After we had finished laughing, the book remained open, and, as the servant called me on business, I went out a few minutes later.

When I came back, Smith was leaning on the table, and looking so attentively at the picture that

ferocious jealousies which are to be found in the Orient. I spent my days in waiting, and I could not say for what I was waiting. I sat at night upon my bed, and said to myself : "Come, think of that." I put my head between my hands, and then I cried : "It is impossible!" and began again on the following day.

In Smith's presence Brigitte displayed towards me more kindness than when we were alone. He came one evening just as we had exchanged a few unkind words; when she heard his voice in the ante-room, she came and sat upon my knees. His tranquil sorrow always seemed to be the result of continual effort. His smallest gestures were measured; he spoke but little, and that slowly; but the rapid movements which escaped him were only the more striking in their contrast to his usual demeanour.

In the circumstances in which I was placed, can I call the impatience which devoured me curiosity? What should I have replied if some one had said to me : "How does it concern you? You are very curious." Perhaps it was something else.

I remember one day from the Royal bridge seeing a man drown. With my friends I was taking swimming lessons in deep water, and we were followed by a boat, with two swimming masters in it. It was midsummer; our boat met another boat, and there were more than thirty of us beneath the middle arch of the bridge. Suddenly, in our midst, a young man had an apoplectic fit. I heard a cry and turned. I saw two hands beating the surface of the water, then they disappeared. We immediately dived; it was in vain, and it was not till an hour later that the body was recovered from beneath a raft.

The impression I received while I was diving

into the river I shall never forget. I searched on every side in the deep, dark water which enveloped me with a confused murmur. As long as I could hold my breath I went on, then I returned to the surface, and exchanged a question with some other swimmer as anxious as myself; after that I went back again to my human fishing. I was full of horror and hope; the idea that I might be seized by two convulsive arms caused me unutterable joy and terror; and it was only when I was overcome by fatigue that I got back into the boat.

When debauchery does not stupefy a man, one of its necessary consequences is a strange curiosity. I have mentioned previously my feelings on my first visit to Desgenais. I will explain myself more fully.

Truth, the skeleton of appearances, wills that every man shall know the world, and this is the price of experience.

Now it happens that at the test some hang back frightened; others, weak and fearful, remain wavering before it like shadows. Some creatures, perhaps the best, die at once. Most of them forget, and thus they all drift to death.

But some men, unfortunately, neither recoil nor waver, nor die, nor forget; when their turn comes to experience misfortune, the other name of which is truth, they approach with firm step and outstretched hand, and, horrible as it is, are seized with love for the livid, drowned body they have found at the bottom of the water. They seize it, handle it and hug it; they are intoxicated with desire to know; their only desire is to see into the great beyond; they only doubt and endeavour; they search the world like the spies of God; their thoughts become sharp as arrows, and a lynx is born in their entrails.

246 A Modern Man's Confession

Rakes, more than others, are exposed to this fury, and the reason is very simple: in comparing ordinary life to a level and transparent surface, libertines are always at the bottom. On leaving a ball, for instance, they go to a house of ill-fame. After clasping in a valse a shame-faced virgin's hand, and perhaps making her tremble, they leave, hastily throw off their coats, and sit down to table, rubbing their hands. The last phrase they add-dressed to a beautiful and honourable woman is still upon their lips; they repeat it amid roars of laughter. What am I saying? Do not they lift up, for a few pieces of silver, the dress, that mysterious veil which seems itself to respect the being it embellishes, and surrounds without touching? What idea must they have of the world? They find themselves every moment to be like comedians in a green-room. Who, more than they, is used to this research into the root of things, and, if the expression is allowable, into these profound and wicked endeavours? See how they speak of everything; always in the most crude, gross and abject terms; those only appear to them the true terms; all the others appear like parade, convention, and prejudice. If they tell an anecdote, if they relate their experiences, they always make use of vulgar and physical expressions! They do not say: "This woman loved me;" they say: "I have had this woman;" they do not say: "I love;" they say: "I desire;" they do not say: "God willing;" they always say: "If I wished." I do not know what they think of themselves, and what monologues they compose.

From that inevitably arises idleness or curiosity; for while they are engaged in seeing everything that is bad, they none the less continue to listen to others who believe in goodness. They therefore have to be nonchalant, even to stopping

their ears wherever the noise of the rest of the world wakes them with a start. The father lets his son go the way of so many others, the way Cato himself went; he said that youth passes. But on his return the son looks at his sister, and see what an hour passed in company with brutal reality has done to him! He must say to himself: "My sister is nothing like the creature I have just left!" and from that day he is uneasy.

This curiosity about evil is an infamous malady born of every impure contact. It is the prowling instinct of the phantoms who lift up the stones from the graves; it is an inexplicable torture with which God punishes those who have failed; they would like to believe that every one can fail, and perhaps they would be sorry. But they inquire, seek and dispute; they lean their head on one side, like an architect adjusting a square, and work in that way to see what they desire. They smile at evil when it is proved; when it is doubtful, they protest; as for the good, they wish to see what is behind it. "Who knows!" that is the great formula, the first word that Satan said when he saw heaven close behind him. Alas, how many unfortunate people have uttered these words! how many disasters and deaths have taken place, how many terrible blows of the scythe in crops ready to sprout! how many hearts and families there were once, where now, since this expression has been heard, there are only ruins! "Who knows! who knows!"—infamous expression! Rather than pronounce it, it would be better to do as the sheep who do not know where the slaughter-house is, and go there browsing on the grass on their way. That is better than being strong-minded and reading Rochefoucauld. ✓

What better example can I give than this? My

mistress desired to start, and I had only to say the word. I saw she was sad, and why did I remain? What would have happened had I started? There would only have been a few minutes' fear; everything would have been forgotten before we had spent three days travelling. Alone with me, she would have thought of no one but me; what did the discovery of a mystery matter when it did not concern my happiness? She was willing to go, and that would be the end of it all. A kiss upon the lips was all that would have been necessary; instead of that see what I did.

One evening when Smith had dined with us I retired early and left them together. As I closed my door I heard Brigitte order some tea. The next morning, on entering her room, I approached her table, and by the side of the tea-tray there was only one cup. No one had come in before me, and, consequently, the servant had not taken away anything which had been used the previous evening. I looked all round upon the furniture to see if there was another cup, and made sure there was not.

"Did Smith stay late?" I asked Brigitte.

"He stayed till midnight," she replied.

"Did you go to bed alone, or did you call a servant to assist you?"

"I went to bed without assistance; every one in the house was asleep."

I was still searching, and my hands trembled. In what burlesque comedy is there a fool so jealous as to try and find out what has become of a cup? Had Smith and Madam Pierson drank out of the same cup? That was the noble thought which came to me!

But I was holding the cup as I walked about the room. I could not help breaking into a laugh

and I hurled it upon the hearth. It broke into a thousand pieces, which I ground with my heel.

Brigitte watched me without a word. For the next two days she treated me with a coldness which was like contempt, and I noticed that she adopted with Smith a more familiar and kindly tone than usual. She called him by his Christian name, Henry, and smiled familiarly upon him.

"I should like a little fresh air," she said after dinner; "will you come to the Opera, Octave? I should like to walk there."

"No, I will stop at home; go without me."

She took Smith's arm and went out. I remained alone the whole of the evening; I had paper in front of me, and I wanted to write to distract my thoughts, but I could not finish anything.

Just as a lover, as soon as he is alone, takes from his bosom a letter from his mistress, and falls into a dream as he gazes at it, so I buried myself in a pleasant feeling of profound solitude, and enclosed myself in doubt. I had before me the empty seats that Smith and Brigitte had occupied. I looked at them with an eager eye, as if they could have told me something. I reviewed in my mind a thousand times what I had seen and heard; from time to time I went to the door and looked at our trunks, which were standing by the wall, and had been waiting for a month; I partly opened them, I examined the clothes and books which had been carefully packed by her delicate hands; I heard the noise of the traffic, and it made my heart palpitate. I spread out on the table our map of Europe, the witness of our agreeable plans; and there, in the presence of all my hopes, in the room where I had conceived them and seen them so near realization, I opened my heart to the most terrible forebodings.

How was it possible? I felt neither anger nor jealousy, and yet a boundless terror. I did not suspect, and yet I doubted. Man's mind is so strange that it knows how to make, with what it sees, and in spite of what it sees, a hundred ways of suffering. In truth, his skill resembles those dungeons of the Inquisition, whose walls were covered with instruments of torture of such strange shapes, and for such strange objects, that the question arises in one's mind, on seeing them, as to whether they are tongs or toys. Tell me, I beg of you, what difference is there in saying to one's mistress: "Every woman is deceitful," to saying: "You are deceiving me"?

That which was passing in my head was perhaps as subtle as the finest sophism; it was a kind of dialogue between mind and conscience.

"If I were to lose Brigitte?" said the mind.

"She is going away with you," said conscience.

"If she were to deceive me?—How would she deceive you, as she has made her will, and in it arranges that you are to be prayed for! Suppose Smith loved her?—Fool! what does that matter, as long as you know that you are the person she loves? If she loves me, why is she so sad?—It is her secret, respect it. If I take her away, will she be happy?—Love her, and she will be happy. Why, when this man looks at her, does she seem to be afraid to meet his eyes?—Because she is a woman, and she is young. Why does this man, when she looks at him, suddenly turn pale?—Because he is a man, and she is beautiful. Why, when I have been to see him, has he thrown himself into my arms in tears? Why one day did he strike his forehead?—Do not ask about things of which you should be ignorant. Why should I not know these things?—Because you are miserable and

weak, and every mystery belongs to God. But why do I suffer? Why cannot I think of it without my soul takes fright?—Think of your father, and how to do good. But why cannot I do so? Why does evil attract me?—Go down on your knees and confess; if you believe in evil you have committed it. If I have done so, was it my fault? Why has the good betrayed me?—Because you are in darkness, is that a reason why you should disown light? If there are traitors, why are you one of them?—Because I am afraid of being a dupe. Why do you spend your nights in watching? New-born babes sleep during that time. Why are you alone now?—Because I think, I doubt, and I fear. When will your prayer take effect?—When I believe. Why have they lied to me? Why do you lie, coward, even now? Why do you not die if you cannot suffer?"

In this way spoke and groaned in me two terrible contrary voices, and a third cried out: "Alas, alas, my innocence! alas, alas, the days of long ago!"

CHAPTER V

HUMAN thought is a terrible lever! it is our defence and safeguard, and the most beautiful present God has given us. It is ours and obeys us; we can launch it into space, and, once out-

side this feeble skull, we are no longer answerable for it.

While I was putting off our departure from day to day, I was losing sleep and strength, and little by little, without my noticing it, my life was leaving me. When I sat down to table I felt a mortal disgust; the two pale faces of Smith and Brigitte, which I watched as long as the daylight lasted, pursued me in frightful dreams. When they went to the theatre in the evening I refused to accompany them; then I went there by myself, and, hiding in the pit, I watched them from there. I feigned business in the next room, and remained there for an hour listening to them. Sometimes the idea of forcing a quarrel with Smith, and compelling him to fight, forcibly seized me; I turned my back to him while he was talking to me; then I saw him, with a surprised look, come towards me with outstretched hand. Sometimes when I was alone at night, and every one in the house asleep, I was tempted to go to Brigitte's desk and take out her papers. Once the temptation was so strong that I had to go out to resist it. How can I say it? One day I desired to threaten them, knife in hand, to kill them if they would not tell me the reason they were so sad; another day I wished to turn my fury against myself. How ashamed I am to write it! If any one had asked me the real reason of my acting thus, I should not have known what reply to make.

To see, know, doubt, pry, be uneasy and make myself miserable, spend the day on the watch, and the night drowned in tears, to repeat to myself that I should die of grief, and think I was the subject of it, to feel isolation and weakness uproot the hope from my heart, to imagine that I was watching while I was listening in the shadow to

the beating of my feverish pulse; to endlessly repeat common phrases, such as: "Life is a dream, there is nothing stable here below;" and last of all to curse and blaspheme God in myself by my misery and my caprice; these things were my enjoyment, the dear occupation for which I renounced love, the air of heaven, and liberty!

Eternal God, liberty! Yes, there were certain moments when in spite of everything I thought of it again. In the midst of so much madness, strangeness and stupidity, there were in me rebounds which suddenly brought me back to myself. It was like a gust of wind which struck my face when I went out of my dungeon; it was like a page of a book I was reading, when, however, I happened to take one which did not belong to the modern sycophants called pamphleteers, who ought to be prevented, in the interests of the public health, from dissecting and philosophizing. As I am talking of these good moments, they were so rare that I will mention one. I was reading one evening the *Memoirs of Constant*, in which I discovered the following lines:

"Salsdorf, a Saxon surgeon attached to the Prince Christian, had at the battle of Wagram his leg broken by a shell. He was lying in the dust, almost lifeless. Fifteen paces away from him, Amédée de Kerbourg, aide-de-camp (I have forgotten of whom), hit in the breast by a bullet, fell and vomited blood. Salsdorf saw that if the young man was not assisted he would die of apoplexy; he collected his strength, crawled up to him, bled him, and so saved his life. Leaving there, Salsdorf died at Vienna, four days after the amputation."

When I had finished reading these words I put down the book and burst into tears. I do not regret them, for they were a good day's work for

me; for I did nothing but talk of Salsdorf, and did not think of anything else. It never occurred to me to suspect any one that day. Poor dreamer, must I be reminded that I had once been good? How would that help me? By disconsolately stretching out my arms to Heaven, asking why I was in the world, and looking round to see if a shell would not fall and deliver me for eternity? But, alas! it was only the lightning which for a moment cleft my darkness.

Like those mad Dervishes who discover ecstasy in vertigo, when thought, revolving around itself, is exhausted through racking itself, and weary of a useless task, stops frightened. It seems as if man is empty, and by means of descending within himself he reaches the foot of a spiral staircase. There as at the summit of the mountains, and deep down in the mines, there is no air, and God prevents one from going further. Then, struck by a mortal chill, the heart, as if changed by forgetfulness, would like to leap forth and be born again; it demands life of its surroundings, it breathes the air eagerly; but it only finds around it its own chimeras, which it has animated with the strength it lacks, and which, created by it, surrounds it like pitiless spectres.

It was not possible for things to go on long like this; wearied by uncertainty, I resolved to make an attempt to discover the truth.

I ordered post-horses for ten o'clock in the evening. We had hired a barouche, and I ordered everything to be ready at that time. I gave orders that nothing should be said to Madam Pierson about it. Smith came to dinner; on sitting down to table, I affected more than usual gaiety, and, without telling them my plans, I turned the conversation upon our journey. I would give it up, I told Brigitte, if I thought she

had not set her mind upon it; I was so happy in Paris, that I asked for nothing better than to stay there as long as she found it agreeable. I praised all the pleasures to be found in the city; I spoke of the balls, the theatres, and the numerous distractions to be met with at every step. In short, since we were so happy, I did not see any reason why we should go away, and I did not think of going yet awhile.

I was waiting for her to insist upon our visit to Geneva, and she did so. Her insistence was feeble enough, however; but as soon as she uttered it, I pretended to fall in with her ideas; then turning the conversation, I spoke on other subjects, as if everything had been arranged.

"Why," I added, "should not Smith accompany us? It is true that his business keeps him here, but cannot he obtain a holiday? Besides, the talents he possesses, and of which he does not make use, must ensure him a free and honourable existence anywhere! Let him come, without ceremony; the carriage is large, and we can offer him a seat in it. A young man ought to see the world, and there is nothing so sad as for a young man of his age to be confined in a small circle. Is not that true?" I asked Brigitte. "Come, my dear, let your influence obtain the consent from him which perhaps he would refuse me; make him devote six weeks of his time to us. We will travel together, and a tour in Switzerland with us will make him return to his office and work with more pleasure."

Brigitte joined me, though she knew that the invitation was only a joke. Smith could not leave Paris without risking the loss of his appointment, and he replied to us, not without regret, that this reason would prevent him accepting. I had ordered a bottle of good wine, and, while con-

tinuing to press him half-laughing, half-seriously, we all three became very animated. After dinner I went out for a quarter of an hour to make sure that my orders had been carried out; then I returned, with a joyful manner, and, sitting down at the piano, suggested some music. "Let us spend our evening here," I said to them; "do not go to the theatre; I cannot help you, but I can listen to you. We will make Smith play if he is bored, and the time will pass more quickly here than elsewhere."

Brigitte did not require much persuading, and readily began to sing; Smith accompanied her with his violoncello. The ingredients for punch had been brought, and soon the flame of the burning rum cheered us with its light. After the music we took our places at the table again; we began playing cards; everything happened as I desired, and there was nothing to do but to divert ourselves.

I had my eyes fixed upon the clock, and I impatiently waited for it to strike ten. My uneasiness consumed me, but I managed to prevent it being noticed. At last the time came; I heard the postilion's whip and the horses entering the courtyard. Brigitte was sitting near me; I took hold of her hand and asked if she was ready to start. She looked at me in surprise, thinking, without doubt, that I was joking. I told her that at dinner she had seemed so determined that I had not hesitated to order the horses, and that was the reason I had gone out. At the same moment the waiter entered to say that the luggage was in the carriage, which was waiting for us.

"Do you mean it?" asked Brigitte; "you mean to start to-night?"

"Why not," I replied, "since we have agreed to leave Paris?"

"What, now? this moment?"

"To be sure; has not everything been ready for a month? You see, there was nothing to do but to put the luggage into the carriage; just now it was decided not to stay here, so the sooner we go the better. Don't you think so? My opinion is that it is better to go now than to put it off till to-morrow. You are this evening in a travelling humour, and I am taking advantage of it. Why wait and quarrel? I cannot bear this life. You want to go, do you not? Ah, well, let us go; it rests with you now."

There was a moment's profound silence. Brigitte went to the window and saw that the carriage was really waiting. Besides, the tone in which I spoke left no room for doubt, and prompt though the resolution seemed, it came from her in the first place. She could not retract her words, nor make an excuse to postpone the start. Her mind was immediately made up; she asked a few questions first, as if to make sure everything was ready; seeing that nothing had been forgotten, she looked round. She took up her cloak and hat, then put them on and looked round again. "I am quite ready," she said; "are we really going?" She took a light, went into my room and her own, opened the drawers and cupboards. She asked for the key of her desk, which, she said, she had lost. Where could the key be? She had it only an hour before. "Come, come, I am ready," she repeated in a very agitated way; "let us go, Octave; let us go down-stairs." After she had said this, she still continued to search, and came and sat down near us.

I had remained upon the couch, watching Smith, who was standing in front of me. He had not changed countenance, and seemed neither

258 A Modern Man's Confession

troubled nor surprised; but certainly perspiration stood upon his forehead, and I heard crack in his fingers an ivory counter he was holding, and saw the bits fall upon the floor. He stretched out to us his two hands at once.

"A pleasant journey, friends!" he said.

There was another period of silence; I was still watching him and waiting for him to say something more. "If there is a secret," I thought, "now is the time for me to find it out. They must both have it upon their lips. Even let its shadow appear and I will seize it."

"My dear Octave," Brigitte said, "where do you think we shall stay? You will write to us, Henry, will you not? You will not forget my relatives, and you will do what you can for me, will you not?"

He replied in a feeble voice, but with obvious calmness, that he would do his best to serve her.

"I cannot," he said, "answer for anything, and in the letter you received there was not much hope. But it will not be my fault if I am not able soon to send you some good news. Count upon me, for I am your devoted servant."

After saying a few more kind words he prepared to go. I got up and preceded him: I wished to leave them together for a moment for the last time, and directly I shut the door behind me, with all the rage of baffled jealousy, I placed my eye to the keyhole.

"When shall I see you again?" he asked.

"Never," replied Brigitte; "good-bye, Henry."

She extended her hand to him. He bent his head and raised it to his lips, and I had only just time to rush back into the darkness. He passed me unheedingly and went out.

Left alone with Brigitte, I felt disconsolate. She was waiting for me, with her cloak under her

arm, and the emotion she felt was too apparent to be disguised. She had found the key she was looking for, and her desk was open. I sat down again by the fire.

"Listen," I said, without daring to look at her; "I have been so guilty towards you that I ought to wait and suffer without the right to complain. The change that has taken place in you has thrown me into such a state of despair that I have been unable to help asking you the reason of it; but to-day I will not ask you again. Is going away a great wrench? tell me; I will resign myself to my fate."

"Let us start, let us start!" she answered.

"Just as you like; but be frank with me. However hard the blow I receive may be, I do not ask whence it comes; I will submit to it without a murmur. But if I must some day lose you, do not give me any hope; for God knows I shall not survive it."

She turned hurriedly round. "Speak to me," she said, "of your love, not of your sorrow."

"Ah, well, I love you more than my life! Compared with my love, my sorrow is only a dream. Come with me to the end of the world; either I shall die, or live by your side!"

As I said these words I took a step towards her, and saw her turn pale and recoil. She made a vain effort to force her tightly-closed lips into a smile; and stooping over the desk, she said: "Just another minute; I have one or two papers to burn." She showed me the letters from N—, tore them up and threw them on the fire; she took some others, re-read them and laid them upon the table. They were bills from her tradespeople, and some of them were not paid. As she examined them she began to talk quickly, with flushed cheeks, as if she had fever. She begged

my pardon for her dogged silence and her conduct since we had been in Paris. She displayed more tenderness and more confidence in me than she had ever done before. She clapped her hands as she laughed and looked forward to a very pleasant journey; at last she was all love, or at least seemed to be all love. I cannot say how much suffering this fictitious joy caused me; there was in this grief, which disguised itself thus, a more terrible sadness than in tears and reproaches. I would have preferred her to be cold and indifferent than exciting herself thus to overcome herself; I seemed to be looking at a parody of our happiest moments. They were the same words and caresses, and she was the same woman; but that which a fortnight before would have intoxicated me with love and happiness, repeated in this way, gave me a feeling of horror.

"Brigitte," I suddenly said to her, "what mystery are you hiding from me? If you love me, why do you play this horrible comedy in front of me?"

"I," she said, almost angry with me, "what makes you think I am acting?"

"What makes me think? Tell me, my dear, that you have death in your soul and are suffering a martyrdom. Here are my arms ready to receive you; lean your head upon me and weep. Then perhaps I will take you away; but really not as you are."

"Let us go, let us go!" she again repeated.

"No, on my soul, no; not as long as there is a lie or a mask between us. I prefer unhappiness to this gaiety." She remained silent, in consternation at seeing that I was not deceived by her words, and that I could read her in spite of her efforts.

"Why do we abuse one another?" I continued.

A Modern Man's Confession 261

"Am I, then, fallen so low in your esteem, that you can dissemble with me? You do not think that this sorrowful and unfortunate journey is condemned? Am I a tyrant, or a despotic master? Am I an executioner to lead you to the scaffold? Why do you fear my anger so that you adopt these devices? What terror made you lie like that?"

"You are wrong," she answered me; "not a word more, I beg of you."

"Why, then, are you so insincere? If I am not your confidant, ought I not at least to be treated as a friend? If I am not to know whence come your tears, can I not at least see them flow? Have you not sufficient confidence in me to think that I should respect your sorrow? What have I done that I should be kept in ignorance of them? might it not be possible to find a remedy?"

"No," she said, "you are wrong; it will be to your own misfortune, and also mine, if you press me more. Is it not sufficient that we are going away?"

"How would you have me go when one look at you is sufficient for me to see that the journey is distasteful to you, that you are going reluctantly, and that you are already repenting of your promise to go? Good God! what is it you are concealing from me? What is the use of playing with words, when your thoughts are as transparent as that glass? Should I not be the last man to accept in this way, without a murmur, that which you give me so regrettably? Yet how should I refuse you? What can I do if you do not speak?"

"No, I am not reluctant; you are mistaken; I love you, Octave; cease to torment me like this."

She said these words so gently that I fell upon

my knees. Who could have resisted her glances and the divine sound of her voice? "My God!" I cried, "do you love me, Brigitte? my dear mistress, do you love me?"

"Yes, I love you; yes, I am yours; do what you will with me. I will follow you; let us go away together; come, Octave, the carriage is waiting for us." She clasped my hand in hers and kissed my forehead. "Yes, it is necessary for him," she murmured; "yes, I will, to my last breath."

"It is necessary," I said to myself. I got up. There was only a single sheet of paper on the table, upon which Brigitte's eyes were fixed. She took it, turned it over and let it fall on the floor.

"Is that all?" I asked.

"Yes."

When I had ordered the horses it was not with the idea of us really starting. I only wished to put her to the test; but by force of circumstances it had become a reality. I opened the door. "It is necessary," I said to myself, and then repeated it aloud. "What do these words mean, Brigitte? What is it that I am ignorant of here? Explain yourself, or I shall not go. Why must you love me?"

She fell upon the couch and wrung her hands with sorrow. "Ah, wretch, wretch!" she said; "you do not know the way to love."

"Ah, well, yes, perhaps I do; I think I do; but I know how to suffer. You must love me, must you not? Ah, well, you must also answer my question. Were I to love you for ever, or were these walls to collapse upon my head, I will not go out of here till I fathom the mystery which has tortured me for a month. You will speak, or I shall leave you. If I am a fool, a madman, if

I spoil my life through pleasure, if I am inquiring on a subject of which I ought to feign ignorance, if an explanation between us destroys our happiness and raises an insurmountable barrier between us, if I render impossible the journey I have longed for, whatever the cost may be to both of us, you shall speak, or I shall give up everything."

"No, no, I will not speak."

"You will speak! Do you think I am the dupe of your lies? When I see you from morning to night more different from your usual self than night is from day, do you think I can be mistaken? When you give me as a reason a few letters which are not worth the trouble of reading, do you think I am satisfied with the first excuse that enters your mind, because you do not trouble to look for another? Is yours a plaster face, so that I cannot see what is passing in your heart? What opinion have you of me, then? I do not delude myself as much as you think I do, and take care that even if you do not speak, your silence does not tell me what you so obstinately conceal."

"What do you want me to conceal from you?"

"I want! you ask me that question! Do you ask me that question to defy me to my face? Is it in that way you want to drive me to extremities and get rid of me? Yes, to be sure; offended pride is there waiting for an outburst. If I explained myself fully, you have at your disposal the full extent of female hypocrisy; you are waiting for me to accuse you, so that you may reply to me by saying that a woman like yourself does not stoop to justify herself. Even the most perfidious and guilty know how to wrap up themselves in these proud and disdainful looks! Your great weapon is silence; I have not known it since yesterday. You only want to be insulted

and you will be silent till then; come, come, wrestle with my heart; where yours beats, there you will find it; but do not wrestle with my head, for it is harder than iron, and as far-seeing as yours!"

"Poor boy!" murmured Brigitte; "you do not wish to go, then?"

"No, I will only go with my mistress, and you are no longer that. I have struggled enough, I have suffered enough, and I have eaten out my heart long enough! It is time for the day to break; I have lived long enough in darkness. Yes, or no, will you answer?"

"No."

"As you please; I will wait."

I went and sat down at the other end of the room, determined not to get up till I had found out what I desired to know. She appeared to reflect and walked resolutely in front of me.

I followed her with eager eyes, and her silence gradually increased my anger. I did not want her to notice it, and did not know what to do. I opened the window. "Take out the horses," I called out; "pay the man. I shall not go this evening."

"Poor wretch!" said Brigitte.

I quietly closed the window and sat down again without appearing to hear her; but I was in such a rage that I could not resist it. The chilly silence, the negative strength, exasperated me to the utmost. I should have been really deceived and sure of a loved woman's treachery, if I had experienced nothing worse. As I had condemned myself to remain in Paris, I told myself that Brigitte must speak at all costs. I searched my brains in a vain effort to find a way to compel her to speak; to find a way at that moment I would have given all I possessed. What was I

to do? She was there quietly and sadly watching me. I heard them taking out the horses; they went away at a gentle trot, and the sound of their bells was soon lost in the distance. I had only to turn round and they would come back, and yet their departure seemed to me irrevocable. I pushed the bolt of the door, and something whispered in my ear: "You are alone and face to face with the being who must give you life or death."

While lost in thought I was trying to discover a way to the truth; I recollect a novel of Diderot in which a woman, jealous of her lover, adopts a very strange way to set her doubts at rest. She tells him she does not love him any longer and is going to leave him. The Marquis of Arcis (that was the lover's name) falls into the trap and confesses that he, too, is weary of her love. This strange scene, which I had read in my youth, had struck me as a clever device, and the remembrance of it made me smile even then. "Who knows?" I said to myself; "if I did the same, perhaps Brigitte would be deceived and tell me her secret." Furious with rage, I passed in review all kinds of tricks and ruses. Was it so difficult to make a woman speak against her will? This woman was my mistress; I was very weak if I did not succeed. I lay down upon the sofa in a careless and indifferent way. "Ah, well, my dear," I said gaily, "to-day is not the day, then, for our confidences?"

She looked at me in astonishment.

"Ah, well," I continued, "one day or another we shall get to the truth. As an example, I think I will begin now; that will give you confidence, and there is nothing like a thorough understanding between friends."

Doubtless my face betrayed me as I was saying

this. Brigitte did not seem to hear me, and continued to pace the room.

"Do you know," I said to her, "that we have been together for six months? The kind of life we are leading has nothing laughable in it. You are young, and so am I; if it happened that the life ceased to be to your taste, would you be the woman to say so? Really, if that were so, I would freely admit it. Why not? Is it a crime to love? Then it cannot be a crime for one's love to diminish, or cease altogether. Why should it be astonishing, at our age, for us to need a change?"

She stopped. "At our age!" she said. "Are you addressing me? What comedy are you playing?"

The blood mounted to my face. I seized her hand and said to her: "Sit down there and listen to me."

"What is the use? It is not your real self who is talking."

I was ashamed of my trick, and I gave it up.

"Listen to me," I repeated, with determination, "and come, I beg of you, and sit down close to me. If you desire to remain silent, at least do me the honour to listen to me."

"I am listening; what have you to say to me?"

"If any one said to-day to me: 'You are a coward!' I am twenty-two, and I have already fought a duel; my entire life, my heart would revolt; should not I be conscious of what I am? I should, however, have to fight, and take my stand opposite the first comer, and stake my life against his; why? to prove I am not a coward; for without that the world would believe it. The world itself demands that answer every time the word is pronounced by any one at all."

"That is true; what are you driving at?"

"Women do not fight; but, as society is constituted, there is no other being, of either sex, who must not, at certain moments in life, even were it regulated like a clock, solid as iron, be called in question. Reflect; who have you seen evade this law? a few people, perhaps; but see what happens if it is a man—dishonour; if it is a woman, what? oblivion. Every being who lives a real life must prove he is alive. There is then for a woman, as for a man, an occasion when she is attacked. If she is brave she rises, makes her appearance and sits down again. A sword-cut proves nothing in her case. Not only must she defend herself, but she must forge her own weapons. She is suspected; by whom? a person of no importance? she can and must despise him. If it is her lover, does she love her lover? if she loves him, there is her life, she cannot despise him."

"Her only reply is silence."

"You are mistaken; the lover who suspects her injures her whole life, I know; the things which answer for her are her tears, her past conduct, her devotion and patience, are they not? What will happen if she is silent? Her lover will lose her by his own fault, and time will justify her. Is not that your thought?"

"Perhaps; silence first."

"Perhaps, do you say? Assuredly I shall lose you if you do not answer me; my mind is made up; I am going alone."

"Ah, well, Octave."

"Ah, well," I cried, "shall time, then, justify you? Finish; to that at least say yes or no."

"Yes; I hope so."

"You hope so! that is what I beg you to ask yourself sincerely. It is without doubt the last

opportunity you will have of doing so in front of me. You tell me that you love me, and I believe you. I suspect you; is it your intention for me to go away and for time to justify you?"

"Of what do you suspect me?"

"I will not tell you, for I see it is useless. But, after all, misery for misery. You are deceiving me; you love another—that is your secret and mine."

"Who is it?" she asked me.

"Smith."

She put her hand upon my lips and turned. I could not say more; we both remained pensive, with our eyes fixed upon the ground.

"Listen to me," she said, with an effort. "I have suffered a great deal, and I call Heaven to witness that I would give my life for you. While I have left in this world the faintest ray of hope, I shall be ready to suffer again; but although I shall rouse your anger by telling it to you, my friend, I am a woman. One cannot go beyond human strength. I will never answer you. All I can do at this moment is to go down on my knees for the last time and beg you once more to go away."

She bowed her head as she said these words. I got up.

"Madman," I said bitterly; "madman to try once in your life to obtain the truth from a woman! You will be despised and you deserve it! As for truth, the woman knows it who corrupts servants, or steals to their bedside and listens to them talking in their sleep. She understands it herself when her baseness initiates her into all sorts of underhand dealings! But the man who asks her frankly, who opens a loyal hand to obtain this frightful charity, will never obtain it! In his presence a careful guard is

kept; his only reply is a shrug of the shoulders, and, if his patience becomes exhausted, the woman rises in her virtue like an outraged vestal, and utters that great feminine oracle, that suspicion destroys love, and that no pardon is possible where there is no reply. Ah, just God, what a hardship this is! When will it all end?"

"When you like," she said in an icy tone. "I am as weary of it as you are."

"Let it be this moment, then; I am leaving you for ever, and let time justify you! Time, time, O my cold mistress, remember this farewell. Time, thy beauty, thy love and happiness, where have they gone? Do you lose me thus without regret? Ah, doubtless on the day that the jealous lover knows he has been unjust, the day he sees the proof, he will understand the heart he has wounded, will he not? He will weep for shame, and have no more joy nor sleep; he will only live upon the remembrance that he was once happy. But, perhaps, on that day his mistress will turn pale on seeing her revenge; she will say to herself: 'If I had done it sooner!' Believe me, if she has really loved, her pride will not console her."

I tried to speak calmly, but I had lost control of myself; I was now pacing the room with agitation. There are certain glances which are real sword-thrusts, they cross like the steel blades; those were the kind Brigitte and I exchanged at that moment. I looked at her as a prisoner looks at the door of his cell. To break the seal she had upon her lips and make her speak, I would have risked my life and hers too.

"Where are you going?" she asked; "what is it you want me to tell you?"

"What you have in your heart. Are you not cruel enough without making me repeat my words?"

"But you, you, are you not a hundred times more ~~stupid~~? Ah, well, madman, you say you are, who wants to find out the truth! Fool, I can say in my turn, who can expect the truth to be believed? You want to know my secret, and my secret is that I love you. Fool that I am! you are looking for another one. The pallor which comes to me from you, you accuse and question. Fool that I am, I wished to suffer in silence and consecrate my resignation to you; I wished to hide my tears from you; you spy them out like the evidence of a crime. Fool that I am, I wished to cross the sea, to exile myself from France with you, to go away to die far from all who have loved me upon the heart which doubts me. Fool that I am, I thought that the truth had a look and an accent which was recognizable, and that it was respected. Ah, when I think of it my tears choke me. Why, if it had to come to this, have you brought me to such a state that my rest will be troubled for ever? My head is in a whirl, and I do not know where I am."

She leant upon me as she wept. "Fool, fool that I am!" she repeated in a heartrending voice.

"What is it?" she continued; "what is the object of your perseverance? What can I do to these suspicions, which are always recurring and always changing? You say I must justify myself! For what? For going away, loving, dying and despairing? and if I assume a forced gaiety, that offends you. I am sacrificing everything to go away with you, and every mile you go, you look behind you. Whatever I do I rouse your anger and incur your abuse! Ah, my dear child, if you only knew what my sufferings were, when I see my simplest words, straight from my heart, received with doubt and sarcasm! By that you

deprive yourself of the only happiness in the world, unconstrained love. You will kill in the heart of those who love you every delicate and noble sentiment; you will reach that state in which you will believe only in grossness; the only part of love which will remain for you will be the visible part which can be touched with the finger. You are young, Octave, and you have a long life before you; you will have other mistresses. Yes, as you say, pride counts for very little, and it will not console me; but God wills that a tear from you will one day pay me for those which you are now making me shed!"

She got up. "Must I say it? Must you know that for six months I have not gone to bed one night without telling myself that it was all useless, and that you would never be cured; that not one morning have I got up without saying that I must try again; that you have not said a word which has not made me think I ought to leave you, or gave me a caress which made me feel that I preferred death; that day by day, minute by minute, always between fear and hope, I have a thousand times tried to overcome either my love or my sorrow; that from the time I opened my heart to you, you cast a mocking glance to the bottom of my heart, and that when I shut it up I seemed to feel in it a treasure you alone could expend?

"Shall I tell you about those weaknesses and mysteries which seem childish to those who do not respect them? Shall I tell you how, when you left me in anger, I shut myself in my room to read your first letters; or shall I tell you that there is an adorable valse which I have never played in vain when I felt too impatient to see you? Ah, wretch that I am, how dear all these secret tears and foolishness, so beloved by the weak, will cost

me! Let me weep now; this punishment, this sorrow has been of no use."

I tried to interrupt.

"Leave me, leave me," she said; "one day I must speak to you so. Come, why do you doubt me? For six months in thought, body and soul I have belonged to you, and you alone. Of what dare you suspect me? Will you start for Switzerland? I am ready, you can see that. Do you think you have a rival? Send him a letter that I will sign and you can post. What shall we do, or where shall we go? Make up your mind! Are we not to remain together? Ah, well, why are you leaving me? I cannot be at the same time near you and far away from you. One must, you say, be able to trust one's mistress, which is true. Love is either a good thing or an evil; if it is a good thing a person ought to believe in it; if it is an evil a person ought to be cured of it. All that, you see, is a game which we are playing; but our hearts and lives are the stakes, and it is horrible! Do you want to die? it would soon be over. Who am I, that I should be suspected?"

She stopped before the mirror. "Who am I?" she repeated; "who am I? Have you considered it? Look at my face!"

"Doubt you!" she cried, addressing her own likeness in the glass; "poor, pale head, you are suspected! poor thin cheeks, poor tired eyes, you are suspected and so are your tears! Ah, well, finish your suffering; let those kisses which have emaciated you close your eyes! Go down into the humid earth, poor weak body, which can no longer bear you! When you are there perhaps you will be believed, if the doubter believes in death. O sorrowful spectre! upon which shore will you wander and groan? What is the fire which devours you? You make plans for a journey, you

who have one foot in the grave! Die! God is your witness that you wished to love! Ah, what wealth and power of love has been awakened in your heart! Ah, what a dream have you been allowed to dream, and by what poison have you been slain! What evil have you done, that you should be smitten with this devouring fever? what fury animates this mad creature who is pushing you into your coffin with his foot while his lips talk to you of love? What would you become if you were to live? Is it not time? Has it not sufficed? What proof of your sorrow can you give, so that it may be believed when you yourself, poor living proof, poor witness, are not believed? To what torture will you submit, which you have not already suffered? By what torments and sacrifices will you appease greedy, insatiable love? You will only be a subject for derision; you will in vain look for a deserted street where the passers-by do not point at you with the finger of scorn. You will lose all shame, even the appearance of that fragile virtue which was so dear to you; and the man for whom you degraded yourself will be the first to punish you. He will reproach you with living for him alone, for braving the world for him, and, while your own friends murmur around you, he will scrutinize their glances to see that there is not too much pity in them; he will accuse you of deceiving him if one of his hands is still clasping yours, and if in the desert of life you find by chance some who can pity you as they pass by. O God, does it remind you of a summer day when a crown of white roses was placed upon your head? Was it this brow which wore it? Ah, this hand, which hung it upon the oratory walls, has not crumbled into dust like the crown! O my valley! O my old aunt, who now is sleeping in peace! O my

lime-trees, my little white goat, my good farmers who loved me so well! Do you remember seeing me happy, proud, tranquil and respected? Who threw this stranger across my path to take me away? Who gave him the right to pass along the village path? Ah, poor creature, why did you turn the day he followed you? Why did you receive him as a brother? Why did you open the door and stretch out your hand to him? Octave, Octave, why did you love me if it is all to end like this?"

She was on the point of fainting. I bore her to a couch, upon which she dropped, with her head upon my shoulder. The terrible effort she had made in talking to me so bitterly had exhausted her. Instead of an outraged mistress, she had become in a moment a plaintive and suffering child. Her eyes closed; I put my arms round her and she remained motionless.

When she regained consciousness she complained of extreme languor, and begged me in a tender voice to leave her, so that she could go to bed. She could hardly walk; I carried her to the alcove and gently laid her upon her bed. She showed no signs of her suffering; she rested from her sorrow as from fatigue, and did not seem to remember it. Her delicate and feeble nature yielded without a struggle, and, as she herself told me, I had gone beyond her strength. She held my hand in hers; I embraced her; our still loving lips united as of their own accord, and, though following such a cruel scene, she slept upon my heart, smiling as she did on the first occasion.

CHAPTER VI

BRIGITTE was asleep. I sat quiet and motionless by her side. Just as a labourer after a storm counts the crop of corn in a devastated field, so I began to probe myself to fathom the evil I had done.

As soon as I began to think of it I decided it was irreparable. Some sufferings, even by their excess, warn us of their limit, and the more shame and remorse I experienced, the more I felt that after such a scene there was nothing to be done but to say good-bye. However courageous Brigitte might be, she had drunk to the dregs of the bitter cup of her sorrowful love; if I did not wish to see her die, it was necessary for her to rest. It often happened that she reproached me terribly, and she had perhaps displayed more anger than on this occasion; but this time her words were no longer vain words dictated by offended pride, it was the truth which, till then hidden deep down in her heart, had prostrated her in emerging. The state in which we were, and my refusal to start with her, had, besides, destroyed all hope; she would have desired to pardon me, but she had not the strength to do so. Even this sleep, this fleeting death of a being who could suffer no more, was sufficient evidence; this sudden silence, the gentleness she had displayed in coming back so sadly to life, the pale face, and the kiss, all told me that it was finished, that I had broken for ever every tie which could unite us. In the same way that she now slept, it was clear that at the first suffering which came to her,

she would sleep the eternal sleep. The clock struck, and I felt that the past hour had carried away my life with it.

Not wishing to call any one, I had lighted Brigitte's lamp; I watched the feeble light, and my thoughts seemed to flicker in the shadows like its uncertain rays.

Whatever I had done or said, the idea of losing Brigitte had not yet presented itself to me. I had a hundred times desired to leave her; but who is there who has loved in this world who does not know what that is? It was only in moments of despair or anger. While I knew she loved me, I was sure I loved her too; invincible necessity appeared for the first time to arise between us. I felt an oppressive languor, in which I could distinguish nothing clearly. I was bending near the alcove, and although I had seen for the first time the entire extent of my misfortune, I did not feel its suffering. My mind alone understood, for my feeble and fearful soul seemed to draw back and see nothing. "Come," I said to myself, "one thing is certain; I wished to do it, and I have done it; there is not the least doubt that we cannot again live together; I do not wish to kill this woman, so there is nothing for me to do but to leave her. It is all over, and I will go to-morrow." All the time I was talking to myself like this I did not think of my wrongs, the past, or the future; at this moment I did not recollect Smith, nor any one else; I could not have said what had brought me there, nor what I had been doing during the last hour. I looked at the walls of the room, and I believe the only thing which occupied my mind was the thought of what carriage I should travel in on the morrow.

I remained long enough in this state of strange calm. Just as a man struck by a dagger only

at first feels the chill of the steel, then takes a few steps and asks in a stupefied way, with staring eyes, what has happened. But soon the blood comes drop by drop, the wound opens and lets it flow; the ground becomes a dark purple, and death approaches; the man at its approach trembles with horror and falls down dead. Thus, apparently tranquil enough, I heard misfortune approach; I repeated to myself in a low voice what Brigitte had said, and I placed around her everything usually prepared for the night; then I looked at her, and, going to the window, I remained there, with my forehead resting against the glass, watching a dark and lowering sky; I went back to the bed. Going away to-morrow, was my only thought, and little by little the word "going away" became unintelligible to me. "Ah, God!" I cried suddenly, "my poor mistress! I am losing you, before I have learned how to love you!"

I shuddered at these words as if some one else had pronounced them; they vibrated through my whole being, as a strung harp does before a gust of wind strong enough to break it. In an instant two years of suffering traversed my heart, and after them, as their consequence and last expression, the present seized me. How shall I paint my sorrow? By a single word, perhaps, to those who have loved. I had taken Brigitte's hand, and doubtless in her sleep she pronounced my name.

I got up and paced the room; a torrent of tears flowed from my eyes. I stretched out my arms as if to seize the departing past. "Is it possible?" I repeated. "What, am I to lose you? I can love no one but you. What, are you going? Is it all at an end? What, you, my life, my beloved mistress, leave me, and I shall see you

no more? Never, never!" I said aloud; and, addressing the sleeping Brigitte, as if she could hear me: "Never, never; do not believe it; I will never consent to do so! What is it, then? Why this pride? Is there no way of making up for the injury I have done you? I beg of you to let us seek the way together. Have you not forgiven me a thousand times? But you love me; you will never be able to leave me; your courage will fail you. What would you like us to do together?"

Suddenly a frightful, horrible madness took possession of me; I came and went, talking at random, looking among the furniture for some death-dealing instrument. At last I fell upon my knees and struck my head upon the bed. Brigitte moved, and I stopped at once.

"If I awakened her!" I said to myself, with a tremor. "What are you doing, poor madman? Let her sleep till day comes; you have still a night in which to look at her."

I reoccupied my place; I was so afraid that Brigitte would awaken that I dared hardly breathe. My heart seemed to have stopped beating when my tears ceased to flow. I was frozen with a chill which made me tremble, and, as if to force myself to keep silent, I said to myself: "Look at her, look at her; you can still do so."

I at last succeeded in calming myself, and I felt more soothing tears flowing slowly down my cheeks. Pity succeeded the fury which had possessed me. A plaintive cry seemed to me to break the silence; I leant over the pillow and set myself to watch Brigitte, as if for the last time my good angel had told me to engrave in my soul the impression of her dear face!

How pale she was! Her long eyelids, with a blue circle around them, still shone humidly with her tears; her figure, formerly so slight, was now

bowed down as if by a burden; her thin and livid cheek rested in her slender hand upon her weak and trembling arm; her forehead seemed to bear the imprint of a diadem of blood-stained thorns with which resignation is crowned. I remembered the cottage. How young she was these six months ago! how gay, frank and free from care! What had I done with all that? It seemed as if an unknown voice repeated to me an old song I had almost forgotten, the song my first mistress used to sing.

"Look at her," I said to myself with a sob; "look at her! Think of those who complain that their mistresses do not love them; yours loves you, she has belonged to you, and you are losing her before you know how to love her."

But my sorrow was too strong; I got up and again paced the room. "Yes," I continued, "look at her; think of those whom *ennui* devours and who have to endure sorrow by themselves. The ills you suffer, others have suffered, and you have never been alone. Think of those who live without a mother, without relations, without a dog and without friends; of those who seek and do not find; of those who weep and are jeered at; of those who love and are despised; and of those who die and are forgotten. Before you, there, in the alcove rests a being whom nature perhaps had formed for you. According to the most exalted spheres of intelligence in their consideration of the most impenetrable mysteries of form and matter, this soul and body are your brother's; for six months your mouth has not spoken, nor has your heart beat once without a word and a heart-beat answering you; and this woman, whom God sent you as He does dew to the grass, has made no impression upon your heart. This creature who, in the face of heaven, came with open arms to

give you her life and soul, will have vanished like a shadow, and there will be only a trace of her appearance left. While your lips touched hers, while your arms were round her neck, while the angels of eternal love joined you together into one being with ties of blood and pleasure, you were further from one another than two exiles at opposite ends of the earth, separated by the entire world. Look at her, and especially keep silence. You have still a night to gaze upon her if your sobs do not awaken her."

Little by little my head grew over-heated and more and more sombre ideas took shape and terrified me, an irresistible power made me sink down into myself.

Doing evil! that was the part Providence had imposed upon me. I doing wrong! I, whose conscience, even in the midst of my fury, said that I was good! I, whose pitiless destiny ceaselessly dragged forward into an abyss, and to whom, at the same time, a secret horror showed without ceasing the depth of the abyss into which I was falling! I, who everywhere, and in spite of everything, had I committed a crime and shed the blood of those hands there, would still have repeated that my heart was not guilty, that I was mistaken, that it was not I who acted thus, but my destiny, my evil genius, some being which dwelt in me, but was not born there! I do wrong! For six months I had accomplished this task; not a day had passed without my working at this wicked task, and even at this moment I had the proof before my eyes. The man who had loved Brigitte, who had offended her, then insulted her, deserted her, left her to take her back, filled her with fear, besieged her with suspicions, and at last threw her upon this bed of sorrow where I saw her lying, was myself! It cut me

to the heart, and as I looked at her I could not believe it. I gazed at Brigitte; I touched her to make sure that I was not being deceived by a dream. My poor face, which I could see in the glass, looked at me in astonishment. Who was this creature who appeared in my image? Who was this man, without pity, who blasphemed with my mouth and tortured with my hands? Was it he whom my mother called Octave? Was it he whom, at the age of fifteen, in the woods and meadows, I had seen in the clear fountains over which I leaned with a heart as pure as the crystal of their waters?

I closed my eyes and thought of the days of my youth. As a ray of sunlight burst through a cloud, a thousand recollections crossed my mind. "No," I said to myself, "I did not do that. Everything around me in the room is but an impossible dream." I recalled the days when I was ignorant, when I felt my heart open on my first steps in life. I remembered an old beggar who sat upon a stone seat before the gate of a farm, and to whom I was sometimes sent with food after our meals. I could see him, bent and feeble as he was, holding out his withered hands to bless me, with a smile; I could feel the morning breeze blow upon my temples, and a freshness like the dew from heaven in my soul. Then suddenly I opened my eyes, and I found in the light of the lamp reality in front of me.

"You do not think you are guilty?" I asked myself with horror. "Corrupted novice, you think, because you weep, that you are innocent? What you take to be evidence of your conscience is perhaps only remorse; and what murderer does not experience it? If your virtue cries out to you that it is suffering, who can tell you that it is because it feels death approaching? Wretch!

those far-away voices you hear groaning in your heart, you think, are sobs; perhaps they are only the cries of the gull, the ill-omened storm-bird, which the wreck attracts. Who has ever told the story of the early days of those who die covered with blood? They, too, have been good in their day; they sometimes place their hands over their faces to recall the past. You do evil and repent of it! Nero did so also when he killed his mother. Who has told you that tears washed us clean?

"Even if it were thus, and true that one part of your soul never has anything to do with evil, what will you do with the other which belongs to it? You will feel with your left hand the wound your right hand has made; you will make a shroud of your virtue in which to bury your crimes; you will strike, and, like Brutus, you will engrave upon your sword the words of Plato! Into the being who opens his arms to you, you will plunge through the heart this bombastic weapon, which is already repentant; you will take to the cemetery the remains of your passions, and you will strip of its leaves upon their tomb the sterile flower of your pity; you will say to those who see you: 'What do you want? I have been taught to kill, and notice I am still weeping, and God has made me better.' You will speak of your youth, you will persuade yourself that Heaven will pardon you, that your evil deeds are involuntary, and you will harangue your sleepless nights to make them give you a little rest.

"But who knows? You are still young. The more you trust in your heart, the more your pride will mislead you. You are to-day in the presence of the first ruin you are leaving by the side of your path. If Brigitte dies to-morrow you will weep over her coffin; where will you go when you

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leave her? You will go away for three months, perhaps, and travel in Italy; you will wrap yourself in your cloak like an Englishman full of spleen, and you will tell yourself some fine morning, in an inn after a drinking bout, that your remorse is appeased, and that it is time to forget it and start life again. You, who begin to weep too late, take care that you will not have to weep some day. Who knows? Let some one jest about the grief you think you are suffering; let one day at a ball a beautiful woman smile in pity when she is told that you remember a dead mistress; should you not be able to acquire glory and pride from that which to-day breaks your heart? When the present, which makes you tremble, and which you dare not look in the face, has become the past, an old story, a confused memory, perchance some evening you will lean back in your chair at a rakes' supper and tell with a smile upon your lips what you saw with tears in your eyes. In this way every feeling of shame is absorbed, and that is how we go on here below. You began by being good, you became weak, and you will become bad.

"My poor friend," I said in my heart, "I have advice to give you: I think you must die. Since you are good now, profit by it by being bad no more; while a woman you love is there dying upon the bed, and while you feel a horror of yourself, stretch out your hand upon her breast; she is still alive, that is enough; shut your eyes and do not open them again; do not assist at her obsequies, for fear that to-morrow you are consoled; give yourself a dagger-thrust while the heart you have still loves the God who made it. Is it your youth which prevents you? What do you wish to spare, is it the colour of your hair? Let it never grow white, if it does not do so to-night."

" What will you do in the world? If you go out of it, where will you go? What are your hopes if you remain? Ah, in looking at this woman, do you not seem to have in your heart a treasure still hidden? Is not that what you are losing? it is less what has been than what would have been, and is not the worst part of a good-bye the feeling that everything has not been said? Why did you not speak two hours ago? When that hand was in that position you could still have been happy. If you suffered, why did not you open your soul? If you loved, why did you not say so? You are like the seeker who dies of hunger upon the treasure he has found; you have closed your door greedy; you struggle behind it. Shake it, it is strong; your own hand has made it. Madman, who desired and possessed your desire, you did not think of God. You played with happiness as a child with a rattle, and you did not reflect how rare and fragile it was as you held it in your hand; you disdained it, you smiled at it and resumed your play with it, and you took no account of the prayers your good angel was offering up during that time to preserve you from this dark day! Ah, if there is one in heaven who has ever watched over you, what is he doing at this moment? He is seated at an organ; his wings are half open and his hands are stretched out upon the ivory keyboard; he begins an eternal hymn—the hymn of love and immortal oblivion. But his knees tremble, his wings droop, his head bends like a broken reed; the angel of death has touched his shoulder, he disappears into space!

" You, at twenty-two, are alone upon the earth, when a noble and exalted love, and the strength of youth, would perhaps have made something of you! When after so much weariness, such bitter

grief, so much irresolution and such a dissipated youth, you saw the rise of a pure and tranquil day; when your life, consecrated to an adored being, could become full of new sap, it is at this moment that everything sinks and vanishes before you! You are then no longer with vague desires, but with real grief; yours is no longer an empty heart, but one depopulated! Do you hesitate? What are you awaiting? Since she does not desire your life any longer, your life is of no further use. Since she is leaving you, leave yourself too. Let those who have loved you in your youth weep over you; they are not very numerous. He who has been mute with Brigitte should always remain so. Let the trace at least of that which the heart has experienced remain! Ah, God! if you wished to live again, would it not need to be effaced? What other way would remain for you, to preserve your miserable breath, than to complete its corruption? Yes, this is the price of your life. To bear it, you would have not only to forget love, but also to unlearn its existence; not only to disown what good there has been in you, but also kill what can be; for what would you do if you remembered? You would not take a step upon earth, you would not laugh, you would not weep, you would not give alms to the poor, you would not be able to be good for a quarter of an hour, without your blood, as it flowed back to your heart, crying out that God had made you good so that Brigitte might be happy. Your smallest actions would sound in you, and, like sonorous echoes, would make your misfortunes groan; everything affecting your soul would awaken a regret, and hope, the heavenly messenger, the holy friend who invites us to live, would change for you into an inexorable phantom; and become a twin brother of the past; all your

efforts to grasp a thing would be nothing more than a long repentance. When the murderer walks in the shadows he keeps his hands clasped upon his breast, lest they touch anything and the walls accuse him. You would have to do the same: make choice of your soul or body; you must kill one or the other. The recollection of good drives you to evil, make yourself a corpse if you do not wish to be your own spectre. Child, child, die an honourable death, so that people can weep on your tomb!"

I threw myself upon the foot of the bed, filled with such a terrible despair that my reason left me and I did not know where I was or what I was doing. Brigitte sighed, and throwing off the bed-clothes which covered her as if oppressed by a tiresome weight, uncovered her bare white breast.

At this sight my senses were moved. Was it with sorrow or desire? I do not know. A horrible thought suddenly made me tremble. "What," I said to myself, "leave that to another? die, go down into the earth, while that white breast breathes the air of heaven? Just God! shall another hand than mine be placed upon that fine, transparent skin; another mouth upon those lips, another love in that heart, or another man's head upon this pillow? Shall Brigitte be alive, happy and adored, while I am in the corner of a cemetery, falling into dust in a grave! How long would it be before she forgot me if to-morrow I had ceased to exist? How many tears would she shed? None, perhaps! There is not one of her friends or acquaintances who would not tell her that my death was a blessing, who would not hasten to console her, and advise her to think of me no more! If she wept, they would try to distract her attention; if some souvenir attracted her,

they would take it away; if her love for me out-lived me, she would be cured in the same way as from poison; she herself, after on the first day saying she wished to follow me, in a month would turn away to avoid seeing in the distance the weeping willow planted upon my grave! How could it be otherwise? How can one so beautiful be expected to regret? She will desire to die of grief, but this beautiful breast will say to her that it wishes to live, and a mirror will persuade her. On the day when her tears are exhausted and give place to the first smile, who will not congratulate her upon her convalescence from her grief? When after a week's silence she begins to endure my name being pronounced in her presence, she will mention it herself with a languishing glance, as if she said: 'Console me;' then, bit by bit, she will reach the condition when she not only avoids memories of me, but no longer speaks of me at all, and opens her windows on fine spring mornings when the birds are singing amid the dew; then she will become dreamy and will say: 'I have loved!' Who will be there by her side? Who will dare to answer her that she must love again? Ah, then I shall be gone! You will listen, faithless one; you will bend down, blushing like a rose about to open, and your youth and beauty will rise to your forehead. While you are saying that your heart is strong, you will let escape that fresh halo, each ray of which attracts a kiss. Let those who say they no longer love, desire to be loved! What is there strange in it? You are a woman, and you know what your body and your alabaster throat are worth. You have been told their value; when you conceal them beneath your garments, you do not think, as virgins do, that everybody in the world is like you, and you know the price of your shame.

How can the woman who has been praised, reconcile herself to being so no longer? Does she consider herself alive, if she remains in the shadow, and if there is silence around her beauty? Her beauty, too, is the praise and regard of her lover. There is no doubt that one who has loved cannot live without love, and that a person who learns of a death becomes more attached to life. Brigitte loves me and would perhaps die of love. I will kill myself, and some one else will have her.

"Some one else, some one else," I repeated as I bent over the bed and my forehead brushed her shoulder. "Is she not a widow?" I thought. "Has she not seen death? Have not those little delicate hands cared for and laid out the dead? Her tears know how long they last, and the second time they will not last so long. God preserve me! while she is asleep, why do I not kill her? If I awakened her now and told her that her hour was come and that we were about to die, joined in our last embrace, she would accept. What does it matter? Is it certain that would be the end?"

I had found a knife upon the table and was holding it in my hand.

"Fear, cowardice, superstition! What do the people who talk about them really know of them? On account of the poor and ignorant we speak of another life, but who at the bottom of his heart really believes in it? What cemetery-keeper has seen a corpse leave its tomb and go and knock at the priest's door? In the past phantoms were seen; the police prohibit them in our civilized cities, and from the bosom of the earth the only cry that now arises is that of the living interred in haste. Is it because processions are no longer allowed in our streets, that the heavenly spirits

allow themselves to be forgotten? Death, that is our end and goal. God has established it, men discuss it; but every one wears this inscription upon his forehead: 'Do what you will, you will die.' What would be said, were I to kill Brigitte? Neither she nor I would hear anything. There would be in the paper to-morrow the news that Octave de T—— had killed his mistress, and the day after it would be forgotten. Who would follow us to the grave? No one who, on returning home, would not dine in peace; and when we were stretched side by side in the entrails of the earth, the world could go on above us without the noise of footsteps awakening us. Is it not true, my beloved, is it not true we should be well-off there? The earth is a soft bed; no suffering would reach us there; there would be no gossip in the neighbouring tombs of our union before God; our bones would embrace in peace without pride; death is a consoler, and that which it binds it does not unbind. Why does nothingness frighten you, poor body promised to it? Each hour which strikes draws you nearer, each step you take breaks the step beneath your weight; you only nourish the dead; the air of heaven weighs you down and crushes you, the earth you tread drags you to herself by the soles of the feet. Descend, descend! Why are you so frightened? Is it a word which terrifies you? Simply say: 'We shall no longer live.' Is it not a terrible fatigue, from which it is pleasant to rest? How comes it that we hesitate, since it is only a question of a little sooner or a little later? Matter is indestructible, and physicians, we are told, torment endlessly a grain of dust without being able to destroy it. If matter is the property of chance, what harm is there in changing it by torture, since its master cannot be changed?

who had given her on her death-bed this little crucifix. I did not remember having seen it before; without doubt, as we were going away, she had hung it round her neck as a relic to preserve her from the dangers of the journey. I suddenly clasped my hands and felt myself bend towards the ground. "O Lord my God!" I tremblingly said; "O Lord my God, you were there!"

Let those who do not believe in Christ read this page; I did not myself believe. Neither as a child, nor at college, nor as a man had I frequented churches; my religion, if I had one, had neither rites nor symbols, and I only believed in a God, without form, creed and revelation. Poisoned as my mind had been from my youth by all the works of the last century, I had quite early drunk the sterile milk of impiety. Human pride, the god of the egoist, closed my mouth to prayer, while my frightened soul took refuge in hope for a hereafter. I appeared to be mad and intoxicated when I saw the Christ upon Brigitte's breast; but, although not believing myself, I drew back, knowing that she believed; it was not vain terror which at that moment stayed my hand. Who was watching me? I was alone and it was night; was it worldly prejudices which prevented me from averting my eyes from this little bit of black wood? I could throw it among the ashes; but I threw my weapon there instead. Ah, what emotion penetrated into my soul! I can feel it even now! What wretches are men who have always made a jest of that which can save a being! What does the name, the form, the creed matter? Is not everything which is good, sacred? How do we dare to approach God?

Just as at a glance from the sun the snow descends from the mountains, and from the

glacier towering in the sky makes a stream into the valley, so into my heart an overflowing stream descended. Repentance is pure incense; it arose from all my sufferings. Although I had almost committed a crime, as soon as my hand was disarmed, I felt that my heart was innocent. A single instant had reduced me to calm, strength and reason; I advanced once more towards the alcove; I bent over my idol and kissed her crucifix.

"Sleep in peace," I said to her. "God watches over you! While a dream made you smile, you escaped the greatest danger you ever in your life met. But the hand which threatened will do no one harm; I swear it by your Christ Himself, I will kill neither myself nor you! I am a fool, a madman, a child who has thought himself a man. God be praised that you are young, alive and beautiful; you will forget me. You will be cured of the ill I have done you if you can pardon it. Sleep peacefully till day, Brigitte, and then decide our destiny; whatever decision you utter, I will submit to it without a murmur. Thou, Jesus, who hast saved her, pardon me; do not tell her. I was born in wicked times, and I have many crimes to expiate. Poor Son of God, who art often forgotten, I was not taught to love you. I have never sought you in the temples; but, Heaven be praised, when I find you I have not yet forgotten how to tremble. Once before death I shall have at least kissed you with my lips upon a heart which is full of you. Protect it as long as it breathes; remain there, holy safeguard; remember that a wretch has not dared to die of his sorrow when he saw you nailed upon your cross; you have saved the wicked wretch from evil; if he had believed you would have consoled him. Pardon those who made him an unbeliever, since you made him repent; pardon those who blas-

294 A Modern Man's Confession

pheme! doubtless they have never seen you when in despair! Human joys are scoffers, and their disdain is without pity. O Christ, the happy in this world do not think they need you! Forgive, when their pride outrages you, for sooner or later their tears baptize them; pity those who believe they are safely sheltered from every storm, and who need, to make them come to you, the severe lessons of misfortune. Our wisdom and scepticism are in our hands large children's rattles; forgive us for dreaming that we are ungodly, thou who smiled at Golgotha. Of all our brief miseries, the worst is, through our vanity, that we try to forget you. But, you see, they are only the shadows which a look from you dissipates. Were you not a man? It is sorrow which made you God; an instrument of punishment made you ascend to heaven and bore you with open arms to the breast of your glorious Father; it is grief, too, which leads us to you, as it brought you to your Father; we only come crowned with thorns to bow before your image; we touch your bleeding feet with bloodstained hands, and you have suffered martyrdom in order that you may be loved by the unhappy."

The first streaks of dawn began to appear; the city began to gradually awaken, and the air was full of confused and distant noises. Weak and exhausted by fatigue, I was about to leave Brigitte to take a little rest. As I went out a dress thrown upon a couch fell to the ground near me, and a folded paper fell from it. I picked it up; it was a letter, and I recognized Brigitte's handwriting. The envelope was not stuck down, so I opened it and read this:

"23 December, 18—

"When you receive this letter, I shall be far away from you, and perhaps you will never see

me again. My destiny is bound up with that of the man for whom I have sacrificed everything; for him to live without me is impossible, and I am going to try and die for him. I love you; good-bye, pity us."

I turned over the letter after reading it and saw that it was addressed, "To Mr. Henry Smith at N——, poste restante."

CHAPTER VII

At midday, next day, with a beautiful December sun shining, a young man and woman arm-in-arm crossed the garden of the Palais-Royal. They went into a jeweller's shop, selected two similar rings, exchanged them with a smile, and placed them on their fingers. After a short walk they went to lunch at the Frères-Provençaux, in one of those little lofty rooms, from which there is a view of one of the most beautiful spots in the world. After the waiter had withdrawn, they leant out of the window and gently clasped hands. The young man was in travelling dress; by the look of joy on his face, he might have been taken for a newly-married man showing his young wife for the first time the life and pleasures of Paris. His gaiety was gentle and calm, like that of true happiness. Any one of experience would have rectified the child become a man, whose confident

gaze was beginning to harden his heart. From time to time he looked at the sky, then turned to his friend, and the tears glistened in his eyes; he let them flow down his cheeks, and smiled without drying them. The woman was pale and pensive; she looked at no one but her friend. In her expression there seemed to be something like profound suffering, which, without making efforts to conceal itself, dared not resist the gaiety in sight. When her companion smiled, she smiled too, but she did not smile of her own accord; when he spoke she answered him, and she ate what he put upon her plate; but a silence seemed to possess her which only showed signs of life now and then. In her languor and nonchalance could clearly be observed that indolence of soul, that sleep of the feebler of two beings who love one another, and of whom one only exists in the other, and is only animated, as it were, as an echo. The young man was not deceived, and appeared proud and grateful; but his pride showed how new his happiness was. When the woman suddenly became sad and lowered her eyes to the ground, he forced himself to assume, in order to reassure her, an open and resolute air; but he did not always succeed, and was sometimes himself disturbed. This mixture of strength and weakness, of joy and grief, of trouble and happiness, would have been impossible for an ordinary spectator to understand; in turn it would have been possible to believe them to be the two happiest people in the world and the two most miserable ones; but though ignorant of their secret, it was obvious to any one that they suffered together, and whatever their mysterious trouble might be, it was evident that they had placed upon their grief a seal more powerful than love itself, friendship. While they clasped hands, their glances remained chaste; although they were alone

they spoke in low tones. As if they were overwhelmed by their thoughts, they placed their foreheads one against the other, without their lips touching. They looked at each other in a tender and solemn way, like the weak who desire to be good. When the clock struck one the woman uttered a deep sigh and half turned.

"Octave," she said, "suppose you were mistaken?"

"No, sweetheart," the young man replied; "be quite sure, I am not. You will have to suffer much, and perhaps for a long time, and I shall always suffer; but we shall both be cured: you by time, and I by God."

"Octave, Octave," the woman repeated, "are you sure you are not mistaken?"

"I do not think, Brigitte dear, we could forget; but I believe that at this moment we can forgive, and that is what is needed now at any cost, even if we never meet again."

"Why should we not meet again? Why not one day . . . You are so young!"

She added, with a smile: "One can see one's first love again without risk."

"No, friend; for you know very well that I shall never see you again without love. May he to whom I leave you and give you be worthy of you! Smith is brave, good and honourable; but, whatever love you have for him, you know you love me still; for if I wished to remain or take you away, you would consent."

"That is true," the woman replied.

"True? True?" the young man repeated, as he looked at her with his whole soul; "it is true that if I desired, you would come with me?"

Then he continued gently: "That is the reason I must never see you again. There are in life certain loves which distract the head, the senses,

the mind and heart; there is one love only which does not trouble, which penetrates, and that one only dies with the being in which it has taken root."

"But you will write to me, won't you?"

"Yes, at first, for a time, for my sufferings have been so keen that the absence of every beloved and well-known form would kill me now. It is by degrees and in proportion as, not being known by you, I approached not without fear, that I became more familiar, that at last . . . Let us not speak of the past. By degrees my letters will be less frequent, till the time when they cease altogether. I will in this way descend the hill I climbed for a year. In it there will be great sorrow and perhaps, too, some charm. When we stop in the cemetery before a fresh green grave, on which are two loved names, we experience a sadness full of mystery, which makes our tears flow without bitterness; in this way I wish sometimes to remember that I have been alive."

The woman at these last words threw herself upon a couch and sobbed. The young man also burst into tears; but he remained motionless, as if he did not wish to see his own emotion. When the tears had ceased, he approached his friend, took her hand and kissed it.

"Believe me," he said, "to be loved by you, whatever may be the name of the place I occupy in your heart, that gives me courage and strength. Never think, my Brigitte, that any one will understand you better than I do; another will love you more worthily, but no one will love you more deeply. Another will humour in you qualities which I repel, he will surround you with his love; you will have a better lover, but you will not have a better brother. Give me your hand, and let the world laugh at a sublime word it does not under-

stand: 'Let us remain friends, and good-bye for ever.' When we were clasped in each other's arms for the first time, long before that time some part of us had known that we should unite. Let that part of us, which embraced before God, remain ignorant that we have separated on earth; let not a miserable hour's quarrel undo our eternal happiness."

He held the woman's hand; she got up, still shedding tears, and stepping in front of the mirror, with a strange smile, she took out her scissors and cut from her head a long tress of hair; then, after looking at herself, thus disfigured and deprived of part of her beautiful ornament, for a moment, she gave it to her lover.

The clock struck again; it was time to go down. When they went back along the galleries they appeared as joyous as when they came there.

"What beautiful sunshine!" the young man said.

"And what a fine day!" said Brigitte; "may nothing obliterate it there!"

She struck her heart with some force; they hastened their steps and disappeared in the crowd. An hour later a post-chaise passed over a little hill on the road to Fontainebleau. The young man was alone in it; he looked for the last time at the town of his birth in the distance, and thanked God for allowing only one of the three persons who had suffered for his fault, to remain unhappy.

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204 Devereux
216 Night and Morning
229 Kenelm Chillingly

MACAULAY, LORD

- 118 Historical Essays
119 Miscellaneous Essays—Vol. I.
119A Miscellaneous Essays—Vol. II.

MARRYAT, CAPTAIN

- 84 Mr. Midshipman Easy
195 The Children of the New Forest
222 Peter Simple
269 Jacob Faithful

MELVILLE, HERMANN

- 146 Typee

MELVILLE, WHYTE

- 85 The Gladiators
145 The Queen's Maries
196 Cerise
212 Kate Coventry

MORRIS, WILLIAM

- 197 The Life and Death of Jason

OLIPHANT, MRS.

- 103 Miss Marjoribanks

PALGRAVE, F. T.

- 95 The Golden Treasury

PAYN, JAMES

- 110 Lost Sir Massingberd

POE, EDGAR ALLAN

- 201 Tales of Mystery and Imagination

PROCTOR, ADELAIDE

- 73 Legends and Lyrics

READE, CHARLES

- 9 It is never too Late to Mend
21 The Cloister and the Hearth
52 Hard Cash
170 Put Yourself in His Place
231 Griffith Gaunt
246 The Course of True Love
249 Foul Play

COLLINS' ILLUSTRATED POCKET CLASSICS—Continued

RUSKIN, JOHN

- 70 Sesame and Lilies
73 Unto This Last, and The Two Paths

SCOTT, SIR WALTER

- 2 Kenilworth
12 The Talisman
22 Ivanhoe
58 Waverley
63 The Heart of Midlothian
90 Old Mortality
101 Poetical Works
112 The Bride of Lammermoor
117 The Fair Maid of Perth
131 Guy Mannering
139 Rob Roy
153 The Monastery
157 The Abbot
163 The Antiquary
168 Redgauntlet
174 The Fortunes of Nigel
177 Woodstock
180 The Pirate
187 Quentin Durward
194 Peveril of the Peak
203 The Black Dwarf, and The Legend of Montrose
208 Anne of Geierstein
219 St. Ronan's Well
232 Castle Dangerous, and the Surgeon's Daughter
234 Count Robert of Paris
235 The Betrothed
243 The Chronicles of the Canongate

SEWELL, ANNA

- 262 Black Beauty

SHAKESPEARE, WILLIAM

- 189 Tragedies
230 Comedies

SLADEN, DOUGLAS

- 146a The Japs at Home

SOUTHEY, ROBERT

- 111 The Life of Nelson

TENNYSON, LORD

- 25 Poetical Works

THACKERAY, W. M.

- 23 Henry Esmond
34 Vanity Fair—Vol. I.
34a Vanity Fair—Vol. II.
65 The Newcomes—Vol. I.
66a The Newcomes—Vol. II.
83 The Virginians
110 The Adventures of Philip
127 Pendennis—Vol. I.
127a Pendennis—Vol. II.
144 The Yellowplush Papers
151 The Four Georges
153 Christmas Books
171 Lovel the Widower
187 Barry Lyndon, etc.
184 The Book of Snobs
192 The Great Hoggarty Diamond
193 The Paris Sketch Book
205 The Irish Sketch Book
207 Roundabout Papers
227 Novels by Eminent Hands

TROLLOPE, ANTHONY

- 79 Barchester Towers

TWAIN, MARK

- 252 The Innocents Abroad

VERNE, JULES

- 226 Round the World in Eighty Days
239 The English at the North Pole
254 20,000 Leagues under the Sea

WALLACE, LEW

- 255 Ben Hur

WALTON, IZAAC

- 88 The Compleat Angler

WOOD, MRS. HENRY

- 10 East Lynne
16 The Channings
26 Mrs. Halliburton's Troubles
30 Danesbury House
51 Verner's Pride
210 Lord Oakburn's Daughters
253 Roland York
257 A Life's Secret

WORDSWORTH, WILLIAM

- 140 Shorter Poems

YONGE, C. M.

- 93 The Heir of Redclyffe
166 The Dove in the Eagle's Nest
213 A Book of Golden Deeds

is she so reserved? If she is only a coquette, why does she allow me such privileges?"

Such are men. At my first words, she noticed that I was looking at her sideways, and that my face was changed. I did not talk to her, but took my place on the other side of the road. As long as we were on the level she appeared quite tranquil, and only turned her head from time to time to see that I was following her; but when we entered the forest, and the pace of our horses began to slacken along the dark rides and among the solitary tracks, I saw her all at once tremble. She stopped as if to wait for me, for I kept a little way behind her; as soon as I caught her up, she set off at a gallop. We soon reached the slope of the mountain, where it was necessary to walk. I then took my place by her side; we both bent down our heads; the time had come, and I took her hand.

"Brigitte," I said to her, "have I wearied you with my plaints? Since I have returned and seen you every day, and every evening, and afterwards asked myself when I shall have to die, have I importuned you? For two months, while I have lost my rest, my strength and my hope, have I said a word to you of this fatal love which is killing and devouring me—do you not know that it is so? Lift up your head; must I tell you? Do you not see how I suffer, and that my nights are spent in tears? Have you not met somewhere in these dark forests an unfortunate individual sitting with his hands to his head? Have you never discovered tears upon the heather? Look at me, look at these mountains; do you remember that I love you? They know it, they are the witnesses; these rocks, these deserts know it. Why have you brought me into their presence? Am I not miserable enough already? Have I ever

lacked courage? have not I obeyed you faithfully? to what torture are you submitting me now, and what is my crime? If you do not love me, why are you here?"

"Let us go," she said; "take me home; let us go back."

I seized the bridle of her horse.

"No," I replied, "for I have spoken. If we go back, I shall lose you, I know; when you get home, I know beforehand what you will tell me. You wished to see how far my patience would go; you have put my grief to the test, perhaps, to have the opportunity to get rid of me; you were weary of this sorrowful lover, who suffered without murmuring, and who resignedly drank the bitter cup of your disdain! You knew that, alone with you in sight of the woods, face to face with these solitudes where my love began, I should not be able to keep silent. You desired to be offended; ah, well, madam, let me love you! I have wept enough, I have suffered enough, I have often enough driven back into my heart the mad love which devours me; you have been cruel long enough!"

As she made a movement to jump down off her horse, I took her in my arms and pressed my lips to hers. But at the same moment I saw her turn pale, her eyes closed, she let go the bridle she was holding and slipped to the ground.

"Good God!" I cried, "she loves me!" for she had returned my kiss.

I dismounted and ran to her. She was stretched out upon the grass. I lifted her up, she opened her eyes; sudden terror made her tremble all over; she pushed away my hand determinedly, burst into tears and escaped me. I stood upon the edge of the path; I watched her as she stood leaning against a tree, beautiful as the day, with

her long hair hanging over her shoulders. Her hands were hot and trembling, her cheeks covered with blushes, shining with purple and pearls.

"Do not come near me!" she cried; "do not take a step towards me!"

"Oh, my love," I said to her; "do not be afraid; if I offended you just now, you can punish me for it; I was overcome for a moment with rage and sorrow; treat me as you will, you can go now, you can send me where you please! I know that you love me, Brigitte; you are safer here than all the kings in their palaces."

Madam Pierson, at these words, fixed her moist eyes upon me; I saw the happiness of my life come to me there in a flash. I crossed the road and knelt before her. However little he loves, he who can say such words deserves to have his mistress confess that she loves him.

CHAPTER X

IF I were a jeweller, and if I took from my stock a necklace of pearls to make a present to a friend, I think I should feel great pleasure in myself placing it around her neck; but if I were the friend, I would rather die than snatch the necklace from the jeweller's hands.

I have seen most men hasten to possess the woman who loves them; but I have always done

the opposite, not from calculation, but from a natural sentiment. The woman who loves a little and resists, does not love enough, and the one who loves enough and resists, knows that she is loved the less.

Madam Pierson displayed more confidence in me, after she had confessed she loved me, than she had ever shown before. The respect I had for her inspired her with such sweet joy, that her face became like an open flower; I saw her sometimes give herself up to mad gaiety, then suddenly stop, pensive, affecting by certain movements to treat me almost like a child, and then look at me with her eyes full of tears; imagining a thousand pleasantries to find a pretext for a familiar word, or an innocent caress, and then leaving me to sit by myself and give myself up to the reveries which took possession of me. Is there a more beautiful sight in the world? When she came back to me she found me on the way in some avenue whence I had observed her from afar. "O my friend!" I said to her, "God Himself rejoices to see how you are loved."

I could not, however, conceal the violence of my desires, nor my sufferings in contending against them. One evening when I was visiting her I told her that I had heard that morning of the loss of an important lawsuit, which would affect my affairs very considerably. "How is it," she said, "that you are telling me about it with a laugh on your face?"

"There is a maxim in a Persian poet's works: 'The man who is loved by a beautiful woman is protected from the blows of fate!'"

Madam Pierson did not answer me; for the rest of the evening she was gayer than usual. As I played cards with her aunt and lost, she employed a kind of malice to sting me, saying

that I did not understand the game, and always wagging against me till she had won all the money I had in my purse. When the old lady retired for the night, she went out upon the balcony, and I followed her in silence.

It was the most lovely night possible; the moon was setting, and the stars shone out with a clearness the more vivid in a deep azure sky. Not a breath of air stirred the trees; the night was warm and balmy.

She was leaning on her elbow, with her eyes fixed on the sky; I was leaning at her side and watching her dream. Soon I raised my own eyes; a melancholy voluptuousness overcame both of us. We together breathed the warm scent which proceeded from the hedgerows; we followed far away in space the last gleams of the pale light of the moon as she descended behind the black masses of the chestnut wood. I recollect a certain day when I had looked at the immense void of this beautiful sky with despair; the recollection made me tremble now everything was so full! I felt that a hymn of thanksgiving rose from my heart, and that our love ascended to God. ✓ I put my arm around the waist of my dear mistress; she turned her head gently; her eyes were swimming with tears. Her body bent like a reed, her half-open lips fell upon mine, and the universe was forgotten. ✓

CHAPTER XI

✓ ETERNAL angel of nights of happiness, who shall tell of your silence. O kiss, mysterious beverage which the lips receive like thirsty cups! intoxication of the senses. Pleasure! Yes, like God, you are immortal! Sublime flight of the creature, universal communion of beings, thrice holy pleasure, what have those said of you who have boasted of you? They have called you fleeting, creator, and have said that your brief appearance has illuminated their fugitive life. Word, shorter itself than the breath of the dying! Fit word for the sensual brute, who is astonished to live one hour, and who takes the rays of the eternal lamp for a spark from a flint! Love, principle of the world, precious flame which the whole of nature, like an uneasy vestal, watches without ceasing in the temple of God! the native land of every one, by which every one exists! the spirits of destruction themselves die, when they breathe upon you! I am not astonished that people blaspheme in your name; for those do not know what you are, who think they have looked you in the face because they have opened their eyes; and when you find your true apostles united on earth by a kiss, you order their eyelids to close like veils, so that happiness is not seen.

But you, delights, languishing smiles, first caresses, timid familiarity, lovers' first talk, you which can be seen, which belong to us! are you less God's than the rest, beautiful cherubim, who hover in the alcove and bring back to this world the man awakened from the divine dream! Ah, dear children of pleasure, how your mother loves you! It is you, curious talks, which institute

the first mysteries, trembling touches still caaste,
glances already insatiable, which begin to trace
in the heart, like a rough outline, the ineffaceable
image of the beloved beauty! O realm, O con-
quest! you it is who makes lovers. You, real
diadem, serenity of happiness! the first look
transferred to life, the first return of the happy
to so many indifferent objects, which they no
longer see, except through their joy, the first
steps made in nature by the side of the well-
beloved! Who will paint them? What human
word will ever express the most feeble caress?

He who, on a fresh morning in the vigour of
youth, has gone out with lingering steps, while
a beloved hand closed behind him the secret door;
he who has walked without knowing where he
was as he looked at the woods and plains; who
crossed a square without noticing that some one
spoke to him; who sat down in a lonely spot,
laughing and weeping without a reason; who put
his hands to his face to inhale a trace of perfume;
who has suddenly forgotten what he has done
previously on earth; who has spoken to trees by
the road, and birds he saw pass; who in the com-
pany of men showed himself a joyful madman,
and then fell on his knees and thanked God for
it; he will die without complaining, for he has
possessed the woman whom he loved.

BOOK IV

CHAPTER I

I MUST now tell what came of my love, and the change it wrought in me. What reason can I give for it? None; I can only relate it and say: "It is true."

Two days, neither more nor less, I had been Madam Pierson's lover. I emerged from my bath at eleven o'clock in the evening, and went out to visit her. I felt such a sensation of delight in my body, and such contentment in my soul, that I jumped for joy as I walked along and stretched out my arms to the sky. I found her at the top of the steps, leaning upon the handrail, with a candle standing upon the ground by her side. She was waiting for me, and as soon as I came in sight she ran to meet me. We were soon in her room, with the door locked.

She showed me how she had altered the manner of arranging her hair, which had displeased me, and how she spent the day in making her hair assume the exact form I desired; how she had taken away from the alcove a large, ugly frame which had seemed to me sinister; how she had renewed the flowers which were all around her; she told me everything she had done since we had become acquainted, how she had seen me suffer, and how she had herself suffered; how she had a thousand times desired to leave the country and flee from her love; how she had thought of many precautions against me, and taken the advice of her aunt and the priest; how she had sworn rather

to die than to yield, and how it had all flown away at a word I had spoken to her with a certain look, and under certain circumstances; and after each confidence she gave me a kiss. That which I found most to my taste in her chamber, and which had attracted my attention among the ornaments with which her table was covered, she wished to give me, so that I might take it away that evening and place it upon my mantelpiece. She told me what she would do henceforth,—morning, evening, every hour, in fact, I might fix for my pleasure, and that she cared for nothing; that the chatter of the world did not concern her, that if she had seemed to listen to it, it was simply to keep me at a distance; but she wished to be happy and shut her ears, and as she was thirty she had not very long to be loved by me. "Will you love me for a long time? Is there any truth in those beautiful words with which you turned my head?" After that she reproached me gently for being late, said that I was a flirt, that I had in my bath scented myself too much, or not enough, or not to her liking; she said that she had kept her slippers on for me to see her naked foot, which was as white as her hand, but that she was hardly beautiful, and she wished to be a hundred times more so, as she had been when she was fifteen. She came and went, quite madly in love and pink with joy; she did not know what to do, or say, or think, to surrender herself again and again, body and soul, and all she had.

I was lying upon the sofa, and at each word she uttered I felt an evil hour of my past life become detached and fall from me. I watched the star of love rise over my land, and I seemed to be like a tree full of sap, shaking off its dead leaves in the wind, so that a fresh verdure might take their place.

She sat down at the piano, and told me she was going to play me an air from Stradella. In particular I love all sacred music, and this piece, which she had already sung to me, I had thought very beautiful. "Ah, well," she said when she had finished, "you are mistaken; the air is mine, and I have developed it for you."

"Did you write it?"

"Yes; and I told you it was by Stradella, to see what you would say. I never play my own music when I happen to compose any; but I wished to make a test, and you see it succeeded, as you were deceived."

What a monstrous machine man is! Was there ever anything more innocent? a simple child would have thought of that plan to surprise the teacher. She laughed heartily as she told me about it; but I felt suddenly as if a cloud had enveloped me; my expression changed: "What is it?" she said; "what is the matter?"

"Nothing; play me the air once more."

While she played, I paced the room; I passed my hand across my forehead as if I were dissipating a mist; I stamped my foot and shrugged my shoulders at my own madness; at last I sat down upon a cushion which had fallen upon the floor, and she came to me. The more I tried to struggle with the spirit of gloom which had seized me, the more the thick darkness gathered around my head. "Really," I said, "you tell lies very well! What? is that air by you? You tell lies very easily, don't you?"

She looked at me with an astonished air. "What is the matter?" she said. A look of inexpressible uneasiness came upon her face. Assuredly she could not think I was fool enough to really reproach her because of such a simple joke; she could see nothing serious but the sadness

which had taken possession of me; but the more frivolous the cause was, the more surprising it became. For a moment she tried to believe that I, in my turn, was joking; but when she saw that I was still pale and almost ready to faint, she remained with her lips parted, and her body bent like a statue. "God in heaven!" she cried; "is it possible?"

Perhaps, reader, when you see this page you will smile; but I, the writer of it, still tremble at the thought. Misfortunes have their symptoms, just as maladies, and there is nothing so terrible on the sea as a little black point on the horizon.

When daylight appeared, my dear Brigitte pulled into the centre of the room a little round and white wooden table; she laid the supper, or rather breakfast, for the birds were singing, and the bees were buzzing among the flowers. She had prepared everything herself, and I did not drink a drop before she raised the glass to her lips. The daylight, coming through the many-coloured cloth curtains, lit up her charming face and her large, heavy eyes; she felt sleepy, and as she embraced me, she let her head fall upon my shoulders with a thousand languishing words.

I could not struggle against this charming *abandon*, and my heart expanded with joy; I believed myself quite rid of the bad dream I had had, and begged her pardon for a moment of folly for which I could not account. "My friend," I told her from the bottom of my heart, "I am very sorry that I addressed an unjust reproach to you on account of your innocent joke; but if you love me, never lie to me even concerning the most trifling things; an untruth seems a horrible thing, and I cannot bear it."

She went to bed; it was three o'clock in the morning, and I told her I wished to stay till she

was asleep. I saw her close her beautiful eyes, I heard her in her first sleep murmur, with a smile, as I leaned over her pillow and kissed her good-bye. At last I went out with a tranquil heart, promising myself the enjoyment of my happiness, which henceforth nothing could disturb.

But the next day Brigitte told me, as if by chance: "I have a big book in which I write down my thoughts, anything which comes into my head, and I want to give you to read what I wrote about you after seeing you a few times."

We read together all that concerned me, and added a hundred foolish things to it; after which I began to carelessly turn over the leaves of the book. A phrase written very large caught my eye in the midst of the pages I was rapidly turning; I read distinctly a few words which were insignificant enough, and I was about to continue my reading, when Brigitte said: "Do not read that."

I threw the book down upon a piece of furniture. "Quite right," I said; "I don't know what I am doing."

"Do you take it seriously?" she answered me with a laugh, seeing, without doubt, my ill-humour reappear; "pick up the book again, and I want you to read it."

"Don't speak of it again," I replied; "what can I find curious in it? Your secrets are your own, my dear."

The book stayed upon the furniture, and do what I would, I could not keep my eyes off it. I suddenly heard something like a whispering in my ear, and I thought I could see, grimacing before me with his icy smile, the gaunt face of Desgenais. "What is Desgenais doing here?" I asked myself, as if I had really seen him. He had appeared to me as he had been one evening,

when he retailed to me, with his forehead bent towards the lamp, in his harsh voice, his libertine's catechism.

My eyes were still fixed upon the book, and I could recall in my memory a few forgotten words, heard long ago, which had oppressed my heart. The spirit of doubt suspended above my head poured a drop of poison into my veins; the fumes of it mounted to my skull, and I half staggered at the commencement of my malevolent intoxication. What secret was Brigitte hiding from me? I knew very well that all I had to do was to steep down and open the book, but at what page? How was I to recognize the page upon which chance had made me light?

My pride, too, would not allow me to take the book; was it really my pride? "O God!" I said, with frightful sadness; "is the past a spectre? Does it leave its tomb? Ah, wretch! shall I never be able to love?"

All my contemptuous ideas about women, all those mocking and fatuous phrases I had repeated like a lesson and a part in the days of my suffering, suddenly crossed my mind; and it was a strange thing that, while formerly I did not believe in parading them, now they seemed to me to be real, or at least to have been so.

I had known Madam Pierson for four months, but I knew nothing of her past life, and had never asked her about it. I had surrendered myself to my love for her with a boundless confidence and enthusiasm. I had found enjoyment in asking no questions about her either to herself or any one else; besides, suspicion and jealousy are so far from being two of my characteristics, that I was more surprised to discover them, than Brigitte was to find them in me. Never in my first love, or in business, had I been distrustful, but, on the

contrary, rather bold, and almost entirely unsus-
picious. I had to see with my own eyes my mis-
tress's treachery before I would believe she de-
ceived me. Desgenais himself, while he preached
to me in his way, continually chaffed me about
the easy way I allowed myself to be duped. The
history of my whole life was a proof that I was
credulous rather than suspicious; so when the
sight of this book suddenly struck me, I seemed
to feel in myself a new being, a kind of unknown;
my reason revolted against my feelings, and I
dared not ask where it would lead me.

But the suffering I had endured, the remem-
brance of the perfidy I had witnessed, the frightful
cure I had to endure, the conversation of my
friends, the corrupt world I had traversed, the
sad truths which I had seen in it, those which,
without knowing, I had divined and understood
with a baneful intelligence, last of all debauchery,
contempt for love, abuse of everything, that is
what I had in my heart without my still suspect-
ing it; and at the moment when I believed that
hope and life were reborn, all these dull furies
took me by the throat, and cried out to me that
they were there.

I stooped down and opened the book, but I im-
mediately closed it again, and put it back on the
table. Brigitte watched me; she had in her beau-
tiful eyes neither a look of wounded pride nor of
anger, only a tender anxiety, as if I had been an
invalid. "Do you think I have secrets?" she
asked me as she kissed me.

"No," I told her, "I do not think anything of
the sort; only that you are beautiful, and that I
wish to die as your lover."

When Larive came into the room as I was at
dinner, I asked him: "Who is Madam Pierson?"

He turned round in astonishment.

174 A Modern Man's Confession

" You have been," I said, " in the country for many years; you ought to know her better than I do. What do people say about her? What do they think of her in the village? What life did she lead before I knew her? What people visited her?"

" Good gracious, sir! I have never seen her do anything but what she does every day; that is, take a walk through the valley, play picquet with her aunt, and perform acts of charity to the poor. The peasants call her Brigitte the Rose; I have never heard a word spoken against her by any one, except that she walks about the country alone at all hours of the day and night; but she does it with such a praiseworthy object! She is the Providence of this part of the country. As for her visitors, she scarcely has any, except the priest and M. de Dalens in the vacation."

" Who is M. de Dalens?"

" He is the owner of a mansion which is beneath the mountain on the other side; he only comes here for the sport."

" Is he young?"

" Yes, sir."

" Is he related to Madam Pierson?"

" No; he was her husband's friend."

" Has her husband been dead long?"

" Five years on All Saints' Day; he was a worthy man."

" Have there been reports that M. de Dalens has paid court to her?"

" To the widow, sir? Well, to tell the truth — he stopped in an embarrassed way.

" Speak."

" It has been reported that such was the case, and it has been denied. . . . But I know nothing about it; I have seen nothing."

" Just now you told me she was not talked about in the country?"

"Nothing else has been said about her, sir, and I thought you knew that."

"Now, once for all, tell me, yes or no, whether he has paid court to her?"

"Yes, sir; at least, I believe so."

I got up from the table and went out on to the walk; Mercanson was there. I expected he would avoid me, but, on the contrary, he approached.

"Sir," he said to me, "the other day you displayed signs of anger, the memory of which a man of my character could not retain; I express my regret to you for being entrusted with an unpleasant commission" (it was his habit to use long words), "and for putting upon the rack your opportunity."

I returned his compliment, believing that he would leave me; but he walked by my side.

"Dalens, Dalens," I repeated between my teeth; "who will tell me of Dalens?" For Larive had only told me what a servant could tell. What means had he of finding out? only from a servant or a peasant. I wanted the evidence of some one who had seen Dalens with Madam Pierson, and who could be relied upon. I could not get Dalens out of my head, and being unable to speak of anything else, I began at once to talk to Mercanson about him.

I could never quite make out whether Mercanson was a bad man, whether he was simple or cunning; it was certain he must hate me, and act as maliciously as possible where I was concerned. Madam Pierson, who had the greatest friendship for the priest (that was his proper title), had ended by having a similar friendship for his nephew. He was proud of the fact, and consequently jealous. Love alone causes jealousy; a favour, a kind word, a smile from a beautiful mouth, can inspire it even to the extent of rage in some people.

Mercanson appeared as astonished as Larive had been at the questions I had asked him. I was myself even more astonished still. But who really knows himself here below?

By the priest's first few replies I could see that he understood what I wished to know, and had decided not to tell me.

"How is it, sir, that you, who have known Madam Pierson for some time, and have been received by her on terms of friendship (at least I think so), have not met M. de Dalens? But, apparently, you have some reason, which does not concern me, for inquiring about him to-day. All I can say on my part is, that he is an honourable gentleman, full of goodness and charity; he was, like you, sir, very friendly with Madam Pierson; he has a large pack of hounds, and entertains largely at his mansion. He was very fond of music, like you, when at Madam Pierson's. He fulfilled his charitable obligations punctually; when he was in the country he accompanied this lady, as you do, in her walks. His family enjoyed an excellent reputation in Paris; I used to find him at the lady's house almost every time I called upon her; he had an excellent reputation. Besides, sir, you understand, I have heard tell of nothing more than honourable familiarity, such as is sitting in people of such sterling merit. I believe he only comes for the sport; he was her husband's friend; he is reputed to be very rich and generous; but I know very little about him except from hearsay."

My ponderous tormentor overwhelmed me with many such involved phrases! I looked at him, ashamed to listen, and not daring to ask a single question, or stop his gossip. He uttered calumnies as long and ponderously as he wished; at his leisure he buried his crooked sword in my heart;

when he had done that he left me, without my being able to detain him; and when everything was reckoned, he had told me nothing.

I stayed alone upon the walk; night was coming on. I don't know whether my feelings were sad or furious. The confidence I displayed in blindly giving myself up to my love for my dear Brigitte had been so sweet and natural that I could not bring myself to believe that so much happiness had deceived me. The naïve and credulous sentiment which had led me to her, without any desire on my part to combat it, or doubt it, had seemed to me a proof that she was worthy of it. Was it possible that these four happy months were only a dream?

"But, after all," I suddenly said to myself, "this woman gave herself to me very quickly. Was there no deception in the intention of avoiding me which she had at first displayed, and which a word had dissipated? Had I not, perhaps, become acquainted with a woman of the class which is so common? Yes, this is the way they make their conquests; they pretend to draw back, so that they may be pursued. Even hinds do the same; it is a female instinct. Was it not her own movement which confessed her love, at the moment when I thought she would never be mine? On the first day I saw her, did she not accept my arm, without knowing me, with a familiarity which should have made me suspect her? If Dalens had been her lover, he was probably so still; there are in the world those kind of intrigues without beginning or end; when the lovers meet the intrigue is resumed, and when they separate it is forgotten. If this man returned during the vacation, she would, without doubt, see him, and probably do so without breaking with me. Who is the aunt, who leads a mysterious life with

charity as its placard, and what is this determined freedom which takes no account of scandal? Might not these two women, with their little house, be adventurers, whose ostentatious probity and wisdom quickly imposed on people, and was even more quickly belied? Assuredly, whatever happened, I had entered with closed eyes on a gallant adventure which I had taken to be a romance; but what was I to do now? I saw no one here but the priest, who would not speak plain, or his uncle, who would say less still. My God, who will rescue me? How am I to find out the truth?"

Thus spake jealousy; in this way, forgetting my tears and what I had suffered, at the end of two days I became uneasy as to what Brigitte had yielded to me. So, like all those who doubt, I put on one side sentiments and thoughts to dispute with facts, to adhere to the letter, and to analyze my love.

Buried in my reflections, I strolled slowly as far as Brigitte's house. I found the gate open, and, as I crossed the garden, I saw a light in the kitchen. I thought of questioning the servant. I turned that way, and feeling in my pockets a few coins, I went to the door.

A feeling of horror stopped me. The servant was an old, thin and wrinkled woman, whose back was bent like one who spent her life on the land. I found her occupied with the crockery. A disgusting candle glimmered in her hand; around her were vegetable dishes, plates, the remains of a dinner, which a stray dog, who had sneaked in, in the same way I was doing, was eating; a warm and nauseating smell emerged from the damp walls. When the old woman saw me, she looked at me with a smile in a confidential way; she had seen me that morning glide from her mistress's

chamber. I shuddered with disgust at myself, and at what I came to seek in a place so well suited to the mean action I meditated. I fled from the old woman as from jealousy personified, as if the smell of the crockery had arisen from my own heart.

Brigitte was at the window, watering her beloved flowers; a child of one of the neighbours, sitting in an easy-chair, buried in cushions, was lulled by one of her sleeves, and, with a mouth full of sweets, was making, in a joyous and incomprehensible language, one of those long speeches which babies do before they can properly talk. I sat down by her and kissed the child's fat cheeks, as if to return a little innocence to my heart. Brigitte gave me a somewhat frightened reception; she could see my troubled looks. I, on my part, avoided her eyes; the more I admired her beauty and her candid manner, the more I told myself that such a woman, if she were not an angel, was a monster of perfidy. I forced myself to recall every word of Mercanson's, and I confronted, so to speak, this man's insinuations with my mistress's features and the charming contour of her face. "She is very beautiful," I told myself, "and very dangerous—if she knows how to deceive; but I will break her on the wheel and keep my head, and she shall know who I am."

"My dear," I said to her, after a long silence, "I have just been giving advice to a friend who consulted me. He is a simple young man; he has written to me to the effect that a woman, who gives herself to him, has, at the same time, another lover. He asked me what he ought to do."

"What answer did you give him?"

"I asked him two questions: Is she pretty? Do you love her? If you love her, forget her; if

she is pretty, and you do not love her, keep her for your pleasure; there is always time to leave her if it is only a question of her beauty, and that is worth as much in one woman as in another."

Hearing me talk like this, Brigitte put down the child she was holding; she went and sat down at the far end of the room. We were in the dark; the moon, which lit up the place which Brigitte had just left, threw a deep shadow over the sofa on which she was sitting. The words I had just uttered sounded so harsh and cruel that I was myself broken-hearted at them, and my heart was full of bitterness. The child called Brigitte and began to cry as it watched us. Its joyous noises, its little prattling ceased bit by bit; it went to sleep in the arm-chair. Thus we were all three in silence, and a cloud passed over the moon.

A servant entered to find the child, and a light was brought. I got up, and so did Brigitte; but she placed her two hands upon her heart and fell to the ground at the foot of her bed.

I ran to her in a fright; she had not lost consciousness, and begged me not to call any one. She told me that she was subject to violent palpitations, from which she had suffered from her youth, and which came upon her unawares, but that the attacks were not dangerous, and there was no remedy for them. I was kneeling beside her; she opened her arms gently to me; I placed her head upon my shoulder. "Ah, my friend," she said, "I pity you."

"Listen to me," I whispered in her ear; "I am a wretched fool, but I cannot keep anything in my heart. Who is a M. de Dalens who lives beyond the mountain, and who sometimes comes to see you?"

She appeared astonished at me mentioning this

name. "Dalens," she said, "is a friend of my husband."

She looked at me as if to say: "Why this question?" Her face seemed to me to cloud. I bit my lips. "If she wants to deceive me," I thought, "I was wrong to speak."

Brigitte got up with some difficulty; she took her fan and paced the room with long strides. She breathed in gasps; I had wounded her. She remained pensive for a time, and we exchanged two or three glances which were almost cold and unfriendly. She went to her writing-desk, which she opened, and took out a bundle of letters fastened with silk, and threw them down in front of me, without saying a word.

But I looked neither at her nor at her letters; I had just launched a stone into an abyss, and I was listening for the echo. For the first time I saw upon Brigitte's face a look of offended pride. There was no look in her eyes now of uneasiness or pity, and, just as I felt quite different to what I had ever felt before, so I saw in her a woman who was a stranger to me.

"Read that," she said at last. I advanced towards her, extending my hand. "Read that, read that," she repeated, in an icy tone.

I picked up the letters. I felt at the moment so sure of her innocence, and considered myself so unjust that I was filled with repentance. "You remind me," she said, "that I owe you the history of my life; sit down, and you shall hear it. Afterwards you shall open all these drawers and read all there is in them, either in my writing or the writing of others."

She sat down and pointed out a seat to me: I could see the effort she was making to talk. She was as pale as death; her changed voice was hardly audible, and her throat was contracted.

knew your lover! Do not reproach me; have courage enough to pity me; I have need to forget the existence of beings other than you. Who knows through what experiences, what frightful moments of sorrow I must pass! I did not expect it to be like this; I did not think I should have to fight. Since you have been mine, I saw what I had done; I felt, when embracing you, how soiled were my lips. In the name of Heaven, aid me to live! God has made me better than this."

Brigitte stretched out her arms to me and caressed me most tenderly. She begged me to tell her all that had been the cause of this sad scene. I only spoke to her of what Larive had told me, and dared not confess that I had questioned Mercanson. She absolutely desired me to listen to her explanations. M. de Dalens had loved her; but he was a man of light character, very dissipated and very inconstant; she had given him to understand that, as she did not wish to marry again, all she could do was to beg him to change his tone towards her, and he had submitted with a good grace; but since that time his visits had become less frequent, and now he had given up coming altogether. She took from the packet one letter, which she showed me, of recent date; I could not prevent myself from blushing when I found the confirmation of what she had just told me in it; she assured me that she forgave me, and exacted from me the promise, as my only punishment, that in future I would tell her at once of anything which could awaken any suspicion in me against her. Our treaty was sealed with a kiss, and, when I left her at daybreak, we had both forgotten the existence of M. Dalens.

CHAPTER II

A sort of stagnant inertia, tinted with bitter joy, is a feeling quite usual in rakes. It is the consequence of a life of caprice, in which nothing is regulated by the needs of the body, everything by the fantasies of the mind, and in which one must be always ready to obey the other. Youth and will can resist excesses; but nature is revenged in silence, and the day when it decides to repair its strength, the will dies, so that it may wait for the renewal and abuse it again.

Finding around him all the objects which tempted him the evening before, the man who has no longer the strength to make use of them, only bestows upon them a smile of disgust. Add to this the fact that the objects which excited his desires are not approached with *sang-froid*; what the rake loves is to be violently seized; his life is a fever; his organs to seek enjoyment are obliged to make use of strong drink, courtesans, and sleepless nights; during his days of *ennui* and idleness, he feels that there is a much greater distance between his impotence and his temptations than another man does, and to resist them it is necessary for pride to come to his aid, and make him think that he despairs them. In this way he without ceasing shows contempt for all the festivals of his life, and between an ardent thirst and a profound satiety, tranquil vanity leads him on to death.

Although I was no longer a libertine, it suddenly happened that my body remembered that I had been one. It is quite easily understood why up to that time it had not done so. Before the grief I had felt at my father's death everything

at first had remained silent. A violent love had come; as long as I was in solitude, there was nothing to struggle with weariness. What does it matter to a man who is alone whether he is sad or gay?

Like zinc, the half-metal drawn from the bluish vein where it sleeps in calmness, makes flash from itself a ray of the sun on approaching virgin copper, so the kisses of Brigitte reawakened little by little in my heart what was hidden there. When I found myself near her, I saw what I was.

On certain days I felt from the morning so strange a disposition of mind that it is impossible to qualify it. I awakened without cause, like a man who has been guilty of excess the previous evening which had exhausted him. All outside sensations caused me unbearable fatigue, all the well-known, customary objects repelled and wearied me; if I spoke, it was to turn into ridicule what others said, or what I myself thought. Then, lying upon a couch as if unable to move, I spent my time in ironical gaiety, and I was not satisfied till my pleasantries had spoiled the remembrance of happy days.

"Could you not leave that out?" Brigitte sadly asked me. "If there are two so very different men in you, could you not, when your evil genius is in the ascendant, be content with forgetting the good?"

The patience which Brigitte displayed when opposed to these derangements only served to increase my sinister gaiety. What a strange thing it is that the man who suffers should make the woman he loves suffer too! Is it not the worst of maladies to have so little control of oneself? Can there be anything more cruel than for a woman to see the man who has just left her arms turn into derision, from an inexcusable

eccentricity, the most sacred and mysteriou events of their happy nights? She did not, how ever, shun me; she remained with me, bending over her tapestry, while I, in my ferocious humour thus insulted love, and let my madness drop from lips still moist with her kisses.

On those days, contrary to my usual custom, I felt a desire to talk of Paris, and paint my life of dissipation as the finest thing in the world.

" You are only a devotee," I said, when I was laughing at Brigitte; " you do not know what it is. There is nothing like it with people who do not care, and make love without believing in it." Was not that as good as saying that I did not believe in it?

" Ah, well," Brigitte answered me, " teach me always to please you. I am, perhaps, as pretty as the mistresses you regret; if I have not the skill they had in diverting you in their fashion, I only ask to be taught. Do as if you did not love me, and leave me to love you without saying so. If I am a devotee of the Church, I am also one of love. What can I do to make you believe me?"

Then she would stand in front of her mirror, dressing herself in the daytime as if for a ball, or a reception, affecting a coquettishness she could not endure, trying to take the same tone as I did, and laughing and dancing about the room. " Am I to your taste?" she said. " Which of your mistresses do I resemble now? Am I beautiful enough to make you forget that it is still possible to believe in love? Do I look like one who does not care?" Then, in the midst of this fictitious joy, I could see her turn her back, and an involuntary shudder made the sad flowers she had placed in her hair tremble. Then I threw myself at her feet.

" Cease," I said to her; " you are too much

like those you are trying to imitate, those my mouth is vile enough to dare to recall to you. Take off those flowers and that dress. Let us wash away this gaiety with a sincere tear; do not make me remember that I am only the prodigal son; I know the past only too well."

But even this repentance was cruel; it proved to her that the phantoms I had in my heart were full of reality. Yielding to a movement of horror, I told her clearly that her resignation and desire to please only presented to me an impure picture.

It was quite true; I came to see her in transports of joy, swearing to forget in her arms my sorrows and my past life; I protested on my knees at the foot of her bed my respect for her; I entered the bed as if it were a sanctuary. I stretched out my arms to her while I was weeping; then she made a particular gesture, took off her dress in a particular way, or she uttered a particular word as she approached me. At once there came into my mind some girl who one evening, on taking off her dress and approaching my bed, had done the same.

Poor, devoted soul! what must you have suffered then when you saw me turn pale before you, when my arms, stretched out to receive you, fell as if deprived of life upon your soft, fresh shoulders! when the kiss was closed within my lips, and the full glance of love, that pure ray of God's light, recoiled in my eyes like an arrow turned aside by the wind! Ah, Brigitte, what diamonds flowed from your eyes! In what treasures of sublime charity you held with a patient hand your sad love full of pity!

For a long while my good and bad days succeeded one another almost regularly; I was alternately hard and sneering, tender and devoted, sharp and proud, repentant and submissive. The

figure of Desgenais, which had at first appeared to me as if to warn me of what I was about to do, was always present in my thoughts. During my days of doubt and coldness, it was almost as if I talked with him; often at the moment when I offended Brigitte by some cruel jest, I said to myself: "If he was in my place, he would have done worse!"

Sometimes, too, when I put on my hat to go and see Brigitte, I looked at myself in the glass and said: "What great evil is there? I have, after all, a pretty mistress; she has given herself to a libertine, let her take me such as I am!" I arrived with a smile upon my lips, and threw myself down upon a couch with a deliberate and indolent air; then I saw Brigitte, with her large, soft, anxious eyes, approach; I took in my hands her little white hands, and I lost myself in an infinite dream.

How can one name a thing which has no name? Was I good or bad? Was I suspicious, or was I mad? I must not reflect upon it; I must go on with the story.

We had as a neighbour a young woman whose name was Madam Daniel; she was beautiful, and also coquettish; she was poor, and desired to appear rich; she came to visit us after dinner, and played cards with us, though her losses seriously inconvenienced her; she sang, though she had no voice. In this uncivilized village, where her evil destiny forced her to remain buried, she was devoured by an intense desire for pleasure; she talked of nothing else but Paris, where she set foot two or three days in the year; she pretended to keep in the fashion; my dear Brigitte aided her to the best of her ability, smiling with pity the while. Her husband was employed in surveying, and on holidays he took her to the prefecture,

where she danced to her heart's content with the garrison. She returned with shining eyes and weary limbs; she then called upon us to relate her prowess, and the little jealousies she had caused. The rest of the time she read novels, having nothing to do with her household, which was not a very inviting one.

Every time I saw her I laughed at her, considering that there was nothing so ridiculous as the life she tried to lead; I interrupted her stories of the functions to ask after her husband and her father-in-law, both of whom she particularly detested, one because he was her husband, and the other because he was only a peasant; so we hardly ever met without having an argument on some subject.

I took it into my head on my bad days to pay court to this woman merely to grieve Brigitte. "See," I used to say, "how Madam Daniel understands life! With her sprightly humour, could one desire a more charming mistress?" I then began to praise her; her insignificant prattle became clever talk, her exaggerated pretensions a quite natural desire to please; was it her fault that she was poor? At least, she did not think of anything but pleasure, and freely admitted it; she did not preach, and did not listen to other people. I went so far as to tell Brigitte that she ought to take her as a model, as she was just the kind of woman to please me.

Poor Madam Daniel noticed in Brigitte's eyes signs of sorrow. She was a strange creature, as good and sincere when not thinking of dress, as she was foolish when she had it in her head. On this occasion she acted as might be expected; that is to say, she was at the same time both good and foolish. One day, when they were alone upon the promenade, she threw herself into

Brigitte's arms, told her that she noticed I had begun to pay court to her, and that I talked to her in a way which could not be misunderstood; but, as she knew that I was some one else's lover, whatever happened, she would rather die than destroy a friend's happiness. Brigitte thanked her, and Madam Daniel, having put her conscience at rest, did her best with her glances to captivate me.

After she had gone in the evening, Brigitte told me, in severe tones, what had taken place in the wood, and asked me in future to spare her such insults. "Not that I take any notice, or believe in these pleasantries; but if you have any love for me, it seems to me useless to let a third person know that your love is not the same every day."

"Is it possible," I replied with a laugh, "that it is of any importance? You can see that I am joking, and only do it to pass the time."

"Ah, friend!" said Brigitte; "having to pass the time is indeed a misfortune."

A few days later I suggested that we should go to the prefecture and see Madam Daniel dance; she regretfully consented. While she was dressing I was near the mantelpiece, and I repreached her with losing her former gaiety. "What is the matter?" I asked her, though I knew as well as she did; "what is the cause of the morose air which never leaves you? Really, you make me live in a somewhat sad *tête-à-tête*. A short time ago your character was more joyous, frank and open; it is not very flattering to me to see that I have changed it. But you have a cloisteral mind; you were born to live in a convent."

It was on Sunday; when we went along the promenade, Brigitte stopped the carriage to greet some friends, fresh and strong country girls, who

were going to dance under the limes. After they had gone, she leant her head out of the window for a long while; for dancing was very dear to her, and she raised her handkerchief to her eyes.

We found at the prefecture Madam Daniel, enjoying herself. I danced with her so often that it was remarked upon; I paid her a thousand compliments, and she did her best to encourage me.

Brigitte was in front of us, and her eyes never left us. My feelings were difficult to analyze; I felt pleasure and also pain. I could clearly see how jealous she was; but instead of being touched by it, I did all I could to disturb her more.

On my return I expected her to reproach me; not only did she not do so, but she remained mournful and quiet that day and the following day. When I called upon her she came to me and kissed me; after that we sat down facing one another, but both of us were preoccupied, and we only exchanged a few insignificant remarks. On the third day she spoke, burst into bitter reproaches, told me that my conduct was inexplicable, that she did not know what to think of it, unless to think I did not love her; but she could not bear this life, and she was determined to do anything rather than put up with my eccentricities and coldness. Her eyes were full of tears, and I was about to beg her pardon, when she uttered some words so bitter that my pride revolted at them. I answered her in the same tone, and our quarrel became violent. I told her that it was ridiculous that I could not inspire in her sufficient confidence to leave most ordinary actions to me; that Madam Daniel was only a pretext; that she knew very well I did not think seriously of this woman, that her pretended jealousy was nothing but real despotism, and,

besides, if this life wearied her, all she had to do was to break it off.

"Be it so," she replied. "I think it will be as well; for since I have been yours, I have no longer been able to recognize you; you, no doubt, played a comedy to make me think you loved me; now you have tired of the comedy, and have nothing but ill for me. You suspect me of deceiving you at the first word you hear, and I have not the right to put up with the insults you shower upon me. You are not the man I loved now."

"I know," I said to her, "what are your sufferings; how is it they are not renewed at each step I take? Soon I shall not have permission to address any one but you. You pretend to be ill-treated, so that you may yourself insult; you accuse me of tyranny, so that I may become a slave. As I disturb your rest, live in peace; you will not see me again."

We separated in anger, and I spent a day without seeing her. The next night, about midnight, I was overcome by such a sadness that I could not resist it. I shed a torrent of tears; I overwhelmed myself with reproaches, which I thoroughly deserved. I told myself that I was nothing but a fool, and a bad sort of fool, to make the most noble and best of creatures suffer. I hastened to her house to throw myself at her feet.

As I entered the garden, I saw her room lit up, and a doubting thought crossed my mind. "She does not expect me at this hour," I said to myself; "who knows what she may be doing? I left her in tears yesterday; perhaps to-day I shall find her singing, and thinking no more of me than if I never existed. Perhaps she is at her toilette. I must enter gently and carefully."

I advanced on tiptoe, and finding the door ajar, I could see Brigitte, without being seen.

She was sitting at her table and writing in the same book which had aroused my first suspicions of her. She held in her left hand a little box of white wood at which she looked with much nervous trembling. There was something sinister in the appearance of tranquillity which reigned in the chamber. Her desk was open, and several files of papers were ranged there, as if they had just been put in order.

I made a noise in opening the door. She got up and went to the desk, which she closed, and then came towards me with a smile: "Octave," she said, "we are two children. There is no common-sense in our quarrel, and if you had not come back to-night, I should have come to you. Forgive me; I am in the wrong. Madam Daniel is coming to dinner to-morrow; make me repent, if you will, of what you call my despotism. Provided that you love me, I am happy; let us forget the past, and not spoil our happiness."



CHAPTER III

OUR quarrel had been less sad than our reconciliation; it was accompanied on Brigitte's part by a mystery, which at first frightened me, and then left continual uneasiness in my soul.

The further I went, the more there developed in me, in spite of all my efforts, the two elements of unhappiness which the past had bequeathed to me;

sometimes I felt a furious jealousy, full of reproach and abuse, sometimes a cruel gaiety, an affected lightness, which outraged in jest everything most dear to me. In this way inexorable memories pursued me; and Brigitte, seeing that she was treated alternately either as an unfaithful mistress, or as a love woman, gradually acquired a sorrow which laid waste our whole life; and the worst of all was that this sorrow, though I knew the cause of it and felt that I was the culprit, was none the less a burden. I was young, and loved pleasure; my youth revolted against this everyday intimacy with a woman older than myself, who suffered and languished, and whose face, which became more and more serious, was always before me, and inspired me with bitter regrets at the loss of my former liberty.

When on a beautiful moonlight night we took a walk in the forest we both felt a profound melancholy seize us. Brigitte looked at me in pity. We sat down upon a rock which overlooked a deserted gorge and spent hours there; her half-closed eyes plunged into my heart through mine, and then she fixed them upon Nature, the sky and the valley.

"Ah, my dear one," she said, "how I pity you! You do not love."

To reach this rock we had to walk two leagues through the wood, which, with a similar distance back, made four leagues. Brigitte was neither afraid of fatigue nor of the night. We went out at eleven in the evening, and sometimes did not return till morning. When we went for these long walks she wore a blue blouse and men's clothes, as, she gaily said, her usual costume was not meant for brushwood. She walked in front of me on the gravel, with a determined step, and such a charming mixture of feminine delicacy and

childish temerity, that I had to stop every minute to look at her. It seemed as if, once started, she had to accomplish a difficult but sacred task; she marched in front like a soldier, swinging her arms and singing at the top of her voice; suddenly she turned, came to me and kissed me. That was on the way there; on the way back she leant upon my arm. Then she sang again, and we exchanged confidences, and tender words in a low tone, although there was no one within two leagues of us.

One evening, to reach the rock, we took a road of our own; that is, we went through the wood without following the path. Brigitte set out so resolutely, and her little velvet cap upon her long, blonde hair made her look so much like a determined boy, that I forgot she was a woman till there was any obstacle in our path. More than once she had been obliged to call me to help her clamber up the rocks, when, without thinking of her, I had gone on in front. I cannot tell the effect which was produced, on a clear and magnificent night in the midst of the forest, by her half-plaintive, half-joyous woman's voice, coming from what appeared to be a little scholar's body clinging to the bushes and trunks of trees, without being able to advance. I took her in my arms. "Come, madam," I said, with a laugh, "you are a pretty little mountaineer, brave and alert; but you will scratch your white hands, and, in spite of your iron-tipped shoes, your stick and your military air, I see I must carry you."

We reached our destination quite out of breath; I had a belt around my waist, and carried something to drink in a wicker flask. When we were on the rock, my dear Brigitte asked me for the flask; I had lost it, as well as a box of matches, with which we used to read the sign-posts when

we were lost, and this was continually happening. I climbed up the sign-posts and struck a match to read the half-efaced letters. This evening all our luggage had fallen on the grass. "Ah, well," Brigitte said, "we will pass the night here, as I am very tired. The rock is rather a hard bed, so we will make a bed of dry leaves. Let us sit down and say no more."

It was a lovely night. The moon rose behind us, and I could see it on my left. Brigitte watched it for a long while rise out of the black indentations which the wooded hills traced upon the horizon. As the light of the moon escaped from the thick copse and spread over the sky, Brigitte's song became slower and more melancholy. Soon she bent down, and, throwing her arms round my neck, said: "Do not think that I do not understand your heart, and that I reproach you because you make me suffer! It is not your fault, if you lack the strength to forget your past life; you loved me in good faith, and I shall never regret the day I gave myself to you. You thought you would begin a new life, and forget in my arms the memories of the women who have ruined you. Alas, Octave! I formerly smiled at the precocious experience you said you had acquired, of which I heard you boast like a child who knows nothing. I believed that I had only to wish, and all the good in your heart would rise to your lips at my first kiss. You thought so yourself, and we were both mistaken. Child, you have in your heart a wound which will never heal; you must have dearly loved the woman who deceived you; yes, much more than you love me, much more; since, with all my poor love, I cannot efface her image. She must have cruelly deceived you, too, since it is in vain that I am faithful to you! What have the other wretches

done; to poison your youth? The pleasures they sold you must have been very keen and terrible, since you ask me to imitate them. You remember them in my presence! My child, that is the cruellest thing of all. I prefer to see you furious and unjust, reproaching me with imaginary crimes and taking revenge on me for the wrong your first mistress did you, than to see that frightful look of gaiety upon your face, that look of the sneering libertine which comes like a plaster cast between your lips and mine. Tell me, Octave, why it is? Why do you have days when you speak of love with contempt, and rail so sadly about our most sincere displays of affection? What influence had the terrible life you led upon your irritable nerves, for such insults to still issue against your will from your lips? Yes, against your will, for your heart is noble. You blush yourself at what you do; you love me too much not to suffer when you see me suffer. Ah! I know you now. The first time I saw you like this, I was seized with such terror, that I cannot give you any idea of it. I thought you were only a rake, that you had purposely deceived me by the pretence of a love you did not feel, and that I saw you in your true colours. O my friend, I thought of death! what a night I passed! You do not know my life; you do not know that I, the person who is addressing you, have not had a more pleasant experience of the world than you have. Alas! life is sweet only to those who do not know it.

" You are not, dear Octave, the first man I have loved. I have in my heart a story I wish you to know. My father destined me, when I was still young, for the only son of an old friend. They were neighbours in the country, and possessed two little estates of almost equal value.

The two families saw one another every day, and almost lived together. My father died; my mother had died long before. I remained under the care of my aunt, whom you know. A journey she was compelled to make sometime afterwards forced her to entrust me in turn to my future father-in-law. He never called me anything but his daughter, and it was so well known in the country that I was going to marry his son, that we were frequently left alone together, and had the most perfect freedom.

"This young man, whose name it would be of no use to tell you, always appeared to love me. A childish friendship became in time love. He began when we were alone to talk of the happiness which awaited us; he described his impatience. I was only a year younger than he was; but he had made the acquaintance in the neighbourhood of a man of evil life, a kind of adventurer, to whose advice he had listened. While I gave myself up to his caresses with a child's confidence, he resolved to deceive his father, to break his word to every one, and to leave me after ruining me.

"His father had called us in the morning into his study, and in the presence of the whole family had told us that the wedding day was fixed. On the same evening he met me in the garden, spoke to me of his love with more fervour than ever, told me that since the day was fixed, he looked upon himself as my husband, and had been so before God since his birth. My only excuse was my youth, my ignorance and my confidence. I gave myself to him before becoming his wife, and a week later he left his father's house; he went away with a woman his new friend had introduced him to; he wrote that he was setting out for Germany, and we never saw him again.

"In a few words that is the story of my life; my husband knew it, and so do you now; I am very proud, my child, and I have sworn in my solitude that no man should ever again make me suffer what I suffered then. I saw you and forgot my oath, but not my sorrow. You must treat me gently; if you are sick, so am I; we must care for one another. You see, Octave, I know what is a memory of the past, as well as you. It also inspires in me, when I am near you, moments of cruel terror; I will have more courage than you, for perhaps I have suffered more. My heart is not very sure of you, I am still very weak; my life in this village was so tranquil before you came into it! I had so often promised myself to change nothing in it! All this makes me exacting. Ah, well, it does not matter. I am yours. You have told me, in your good moments, that Providence has charged me with watching over you like a mother. That is the truth, my friend; I am not your mistress every day; many days when I am your mistress I want to be your mother. Yes, when you make me suffer, I do not recognize you as my lover; you are only a sick child, defiant, or mutinous, whom I desire to care for and cure, so that I may recover my lover, whom I wish always to love. May God give me strength," she added, looking towards the sky. "May God who sees us, who hears me, the God of mothers and lovers, allow me to accomplish my task! When I feel I must succumb, when my pride revolts, when in spite of myself my poor heart breaks, when all my life——"

She did not finish her sentence, for her tears stopped her. O God, I saw her on her knees, with clasped hands, bending upon the rock; the wind made her quiver before me like the heather which surrounded us. Frail and sublime crea-

ture; she was praying for her lover. I raised her in my arms. "My only love," I cried, "my mistress, my mother and my sister. Pray, too, for me, that I may love you as you deserve. Pray that I may live; that my heart may be washed in your tears; that it may become a stainless offering, and we may divide it before God!"

We sank down upon the rock. Everything was silent around us; above our heads was a sky full of stars. "Do you recognize it?" I asked Brigitte; "do you remember the first day?"

Since that evening we have never returned to the rock. It is an altar which has remained pure; it is one of the only spectres of my life which can still be clothed in white when it passes before my eyes.

CHAPTER IV

As I walked across the square I saw two men stop; one of them said in a loud voice: "He seems to have ill-treated her." "It was her fault," the other replied; "why did she choose such a man? He has only had to do with courtesans; she is reaping the reward of her folly."

I went forward in the darkness to recognize the men who were speaking, and to try and hear more; but they went away when they saw me.

I found Brigitte in distress; her aunt was seriously ill; she had only time to say a few words

to me. I could not see her for a whole week; I knew that she sent for a doctor from Paris; at last one day she sent for me.

"My aunt is dead," she said to me; "I have lost the only creature I had left on earth. I am now alone in the world, and I am going away from the country."

"Am I, then, really nothing to you?" I asked her.

"Yes, my friend," she replied; "you know that I love you, and I often believe that you love me. But how could I rely upon you? I am your mistress, alas! without you being my lover. It was about you that Shakespeare said those sad words: 'Make yourself a garment of shot silk, for your heart is like the opal, with its thousand colours.' I, Octave," she said, as she pointed out her mourning dress to me, "I am vowed to one colour, and it will last a long while, for I shall never change it."

"Leave the country if you like," I told her; "I shall either kill myself or follow you. Ah, Brigitte," I continued, throwing myself upon my knees before her, "you thought you were alone when you saw your aunt die! That is the most cruel punishment you could inflict upon me; never have I felt more grievously the misery of my love for you. You must retract that horrible thought; I deserve it, but it is killing me. O God, if it were true that I count for nothing in your life, or only count as anything by the ill I do you!"

"I do not know," she said, "who is interfering in our business; for some time in this village and the neighbourhood strange gossip has been spreading. Some say I am ruined; they accuse me of imprudence and folly; others represent you as a cruel and dangerous man. They have searched, in some way, our most secret thoughts;

things which I thought I was the only one to know, your eccentric conduct and the sad scenes it has given rise to, are all well known; my poor aunt spoke to me about it, and she had known a long time before she spoke. Perhaps that made her go down more quickly and cruelly to her grave? When I meet my old friends in the street, they address me coldly, or turn away at my approach; my beloved peasants themselves, those good girls who loved me so, shrug their shoulders on Sunday when they see my empty place near the orchestra at their little dance. What is the reason of it? I do not know, nor do you; but I must go away, I cannot bear it. After her death, the sudden and frightful malady, the empty room, my courage has failed me; my friend, my friend, do not abandon me!"

She wept; I saw in the next room everything in disorder, a trunk on the floor, and everything seemed to point to preparations for departure. It was clear that soon after her aunt's death Brigitte had wanted to go away without me, and had not had strength to do so. She was so overwhelmed that she could hardly speak; her position was a terrible one, and I was the cause of it. Not only was she unhappy, but she was outraged in public, and the man to whom she should have turned for consolation and support, was only a still more fruitful source of inquietude and torment.

I felt my faults so keenly, that I was ashamed of myself. After so many promises, so much useless exaltation, so many proposals and so many hopes, what had I done in the space of three months! I believed in my heart I had a treasure, but the only thing which had issued from it was gall, the shadow of a dream, and the unhappiness of the woman I adored. For the first time I was really face to face with myself; Brigitte did not

reproach me with anything; she had desired to go away and could not; she was ready to suffer again. I asked myself suddenly whether I ought not to leave, whether it was not my duty to flee and deliver her from a scourge.

I got up, and, going into the next room, I sat down upon Brigitte's trunk. I leaned my forehead in my hands, and remained as if I were overwhelmed. I looked around me at these half-finished packages, and the things lying about; alas! I knew them all; there was a little bit of my heart which had been touched after all. I began to reckon up the evil I had caused; I could see my dear Brigitte walking along the lime avenue, followed by her white kid.

"O man," I cried, "by what right? What made me so daring as to come here and put my hand upon this woman? Who has permitted her to suffer at your hands? You dress yourself before your glass, and you go jauntily to see your sorrowing mistress; you sit down upon the cushions, where she prays for you and herself, and you gently tap, with a nonchalant air, those slender and still trembling hands! You play the spoilt child, you jest with suffering; you would have the heartlessness to commit a boudoir murder with pin thrusts. What will you say to the living God when your work is finished? What becomes of the woman who loves you? Where are you sliding, where are you falling, while she leans on you? With what expression of face will you one day bury your pale and miserable lover, as she has just buried the last of her protectors? Yes, without a doubt, you will bury her, for your love kills and consumes her; you have vowed her to your furies, and she it is who appeases them. If you follow this woman, she will die through you. Take care! her good angel hesi-

tates; he has struck his blow at this house to drive away from it a fatal and shameful passion! He has inspired in Brigitte the thought of departure; perhaps at this moment he is whispering his last warning in her ear. Assassin, executioner, take care; it is a question of life and death!"

In this way I talked to myself; then I noticed upon a corner of the sofa a little dress of striped gingham, folded ready to go in the trunk. It had been the witness of one of our happy days. I touched it and picked it up.

"I leave you!" I said to it; "I ruin you! O little dress! Do you want to go without me?"

"No, I cannot abandon Brigitte; at this moment it would be cowardice. She has just lost her aunt, and is alone; she is the butt of some unknown enemy's scandal. It can only be Mercanson; he doubtless has told about his conversation with me on Dalens, and seeing that I was jealous one day, he has concluded and guessed the rest. He is indeed the snake who has slavered upon my beloved flower. I must first of all punish him, and afterwards repair the wrong I have done Brigitte. Madman that I am! I think of leaving her, when I must consecrate my life to her, expiate my crimes, and give her back, in happiness, care and love, that which I have made flow in tears from her eyes! Since I am her only support in the world, her only friend, her only sword, I must follow her to the end of the world, make a shelter for her with my body, and console her for loving me and giving herself to me!"

"Brigitte," I cried as I entered the room where she had remained, "wait an hour for me and I will return."

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"Wait for me," I said; "do not go without me. Remember the words of Ruth: 'In whatsoever place you go; your people shall be my people, and your God my God; in the land where you die, there I shall die, and I shall be buried in the same place as you are.' "

I left her hurriedly and hastened to Mercanson's house; I was told he had gone out, so I went in to await his return.

I sat down in one corner, upon the priest's leather chair, before his black and dirty table. I began to find the time long, when I remembered my duel on the subject of my first mistress.

"In that," I said to myself, "I received a pistol bullet, and looked a ridiculous fool. What can I do here? The priest will not fight; if I try to force a quarrel, he will reply that the form of his dress enables him to dispense with listening to me, and he will gossip a little more about it when I have gone. Besides, what is his gossip? What does Brigitte fear? It is said that she is losing her reputation, that I ill-treat her, and that she is wrong to endure it. What foolishness! It concerns no one; we cannot do better than let them continue saying so; in a case like this to take notice of these wretches is to give them importance. Is it possible to prevent country people from minding other people's business? Is it possible to prevent prudes from slandering a woman who takes a lover? What means would it be possible to devise to make a public rumour cease? If people say that I ill-treat her, it is for me to prove the contrary by my conduct to her, and not by violence. It would be as ridiculous to seek a quarrel with Mercanson as to leave a district because of gossip. No, we must not go away, it is bad policy; it would be telling the world it was right and admitting defeat by the

gossipers. We must not go away, nor must we take any notice of gossip."

I went back to Brigitte. Half-an-hour had hardly passed, and I had changed my mind three times. I dissuaded her from her plan; I told her what I had made up my mind to do, and why I had restrained from doing it. She listened resignedly to me; but she wanted to go away; the house in which her aunt had died was odious to her; it required much effort on my part to make her consent to remain; at last I succeeded. We repeated that we despised gossip, that we must not give way in anything, nor change our usual life. I swore to her that my love would console her for all her grief, and she pretended to hope that it was so. I told her that this event had shown me so clearly my mistake, that my conduct would prove my repentance; that I desired to drive away from me like a phantom all the bad leaven which remained in my heart, that henceforth she would neither have to suffer from my pride nor from my caprices; and so, with her arms still round my neck, she sadly and patiently obeyed a pure caprice, which I myself thought was a flash of reason.

CHAPTER V

ONE day on entering I saw a little room, which she called her oratory, open; all the furniture in it was a desk and a little altar, with a cross and a few vases of flowers. Everything else, the

walls and the curtains, were as white as snow. She occasionally shut herself up there, though she had rarely done so since I had lived with her.

I looked in the door, and I saw Brigitte sitting on the ground, in the midst of flowers she had strewn. She held a little crown, which seemed to be made of dry herbs, and appeared to be breaking it.

"What are you doing?" I asked her. She shuddered and got up. "It is nothing," she said; "merely a toy I had when a child; it is an old crown of roses which has faded in this oratory; I put it there long ago; I have come to change my flowers."

She spoke in a trembling voice, and seemed ready to faint. I remembered the name Brigitte the Rose, which I had heard her called. I asked her if it was her rose-crown she had just broken.

"No," she replied, turning pale.

"Yes!" I cried; "yes, on my life; give me the bits!"

I picked them up and put them on the altar, then I remained silent, with my eyes fixed upon the fragments.

"Have I not the right," she said, "if it was my crown, to take it down from this wall, where it has hung so long? What use are these relics? Brigitte the Rose is no longer in this world, no more than are the roses which gave her her name."

She went out; I heard a sob, and the door closed upon me; I fell upon my knees on the stones and wept bitterly.

When I went up to her room, I found her sitting at the table; the dinner was ready, and she was waiting for me. I took my place in silence, but there was no doubt as to the subject in our minds.

CHAPTER VI

It was Mercanson who had spoken in the village and the surrounding country-houses of my conversation with him about Dalens, and the suspicions which I had, unwillingly, allowed him to observe. It is well known how in the provinces slanderous gossip travels from mouth to mouth and becomes exaggerated; that was what had happened.

Brigitte and I found ourselves facing one another in a new position. Whatever weakness she displayed in her attempt at departure, she none the less made the attempt. It was because of my prayer that she had remained; that was an obligation. I had made up my mind to disturb her repose neither by my jealousy nor by my frivolous conduct; each unkind or sneering word which escaped me was a fault, each sorrowful look she fixed upon me was a deserved and appreciated reproach.

Her good and simple disposition made her at first find more charm in her solitude; she could see me at any hour without being obliged to adopt any precautions. Perhaps she did it to prove to me that she preferred her love to her reputation; she seemed to repent of having shown herself sensible to the gossip of the slanderers. Instead of taking precautions and protecting ourselves from curiosity, we, on the contrary, adopted a more open and careless kind of life than before.

I went to her house at breakfast time, and, having nothing to do during the day, I only went out with her. She kept me to dinner, consequently I spent the evening with her, and when the hour for departure arrived, we imagined a

thousand pretexts, we took a thousand illusionary precautions which really were not precautions. At last I lived with her, and we made out we believed no one noticed it.

I kept my word for a time, and not a cloud disturbed our joint existence. They were happy hours; but it is not of them I must speak.

It was reported everywhere in the country that Brigitte was publicly living with a libertine from Paris; that her lover ill-treated her, that their time was spent in separating and resuming their liaison, but that it would end badly. Just as much as her past conduct had been praised, so was she blamed now. There was nothing in her previous conduct deserving the praise, upon which people did not now put an evil construction. Her solitary walks in the mountains with charity as their object, which had never given rise to suspicion, suddenly became the subject of joking sarcasm. She was spoken of as a woman who had lost all human respect, and who, in justice, ought to be attacked by inevitable and frightful misfortunes.

I had told Brigitte that my idea was to let people talk, and I did not wish to appear to take any notice; but the truth is, it became quite unbearable. I sometimes went out on purpose and made calls in the neighbourhood to try and hear a positive word which I could regard as an insult, so as to demand satisfaction. I listened attentively to everything said in a low voice in a drawing-room in which I was, but I could seize upon nothing; to rend me at their leisure, they waited till I had gone. I went back to Brigitte and told her that all these stories were started by wretches whom it would be madness to notice; that they could talk about us as much as they pleased, and I did not want to know anything about it.

Was I not guilty beyond expression? If

Brigitte was imprudent, was it not my place to reflect and warn her of the danger? On the contrary, I took what might be called the side of the world against her.

I began by being heedless, and soon became wicked. "Really," I said to Brigitte, "people talk about your night excursions. Are you quite sure they are wrong? Has nothing taken place in the rides and grottoes of this romantic forest? Have you never accepted, on your return in the dusk, the arm of an unknown, as you accepted mine? Was it indeed charity which was your only divinity in this beautiful temple of verdure which you traversed so courageously?"

Brigitte's first glance when I began to take this tone will never leave my memory; I myself shuddered. "But, bah!" I thought, "she would do as my first mistress did if I took her part; she pointed me out with her finger as a ridiculous fool, and I should pay for everything in the eyes of the public."

From the man who doubts to the man who denies there is hardly any distance. Every philosopher is the cousin of an atheist. After telling Brigitte that I doubted her past conduct, I really did doubt it; and as soon as I began to doubt I did not believe in it.

I began to believe that Brigitte deceived me, though I did not leave her for an hour in the day; I sometimes was absent long enough on purpose, and I made up my mind that it was to try her; but in reality it was only to give myself a subject for doubt and sarcasm. Then I was content when I gave her to understand that, far from being still jealous, I took no notice of those foolish fears which formerly crossed my mind; to be sure, that meant I did not esteem her sufficiently to be jealous of her.

I at first kept these remarks to myself; but I soon took pleasure in making them aloud in Brigitte's presence. If we went for a walk, I would say: "That dress is pretty; the daughter of one of my friends has one like it." If we were at table: "Come, my dear," I would say, "my former mistress used to sing a song during dessert; you must do so too." If she sat down to the piano, I would say: "Ah, thank you, play me the valse which was fashionable last winter; that will recall to my mind good times."

Reader, this lasted for six months; for six whole months Brigitte, though calumniated and exposed to the insults of the world, had to bear from me all the disdain and insults a cruel and angry libertine can heap upon the girl he pays.

After these frightful scenes, when my mind was exhausted by torture and my own heart rent, when I was first accusing, then sneering, but always eager for suffering and to return to the past, a strange love and excessive exaltation made me treat my mistress like an idol, like a divinity. A quarter of an hour after insulting her I was on my knees; as soon as I ceased to accuse her I asked her pardon; as soon as I left off sneering I began to weep. Then an unheard-of delirium, a fever of happiness took possession of me; I was overwhelmed with joy, I almost lost my senses through the violence of my transports; I did not know what to do, what to say, what to think, to repair the ill I had done. I took Brigitte in my arms and made her repeat a hundred times, a thousand times, that she loved me and forgave me. I talked of expiating my crimes and blowing out my brains if I began again to ill-treat her. These transports of the heart lasted for whole nights, during which I did not cease talk-

ing, weeping and grovelling at Brigitte's feet, intoxicated as I was with a mad, entrancing and boundless love. Then morning came, and daylight appeared; I fell down, without any strength left, went to sleep, and awakened with a smile on my lips, mocking at everything and believing in nothing.

During those nights of terrible voluptuousness Brigitte did not seem to recollect that there was another man in me besides the one she had before her eyes. When I begged her pardon, she shrugged her shoulders, as if to say: "Do not you know that I forgive you?" She felt herself seized by my fever. Many times I have seen her, pale with pleasure and love, tell me that she desired me thus; that these storms were her life; that the suffering she endured was dear to her when it was paid for in this way, that she would never complain, as long as there remained in my heart a spark of our love; that she knew that she would die of it, and she hoped I would do so, too; and, last of all, that everything seemed to her good and gentle when it came from me, insults just the same as tears, and that these delights were her tomb.

But the days passed, and my malady ceaselessly took possession of me, my access of malice and irony took a sombre and intractable form. I had in the midst of my folly real attacks of fever, which struck me like lightning; I awakened trembling and covered with a cold sweat. A surprise motion, or an unsuspected impression, made me tremble so that I frightened those who saw me; Brigitte, on her side, though she did not complain, showed on her face the marks of a profound alteration. When I began to ill-treat her, she went away, without a word, and shut herself in. Thank God, I never struck her; in

my most violent moments I would rather have died than raise my hand to her.

One evening the rain was beating on the windows; we were alone, with the curtains drawn. "I feel in a joyful humour," I said to Brigitte, "and yet this horrible weather makes me miserable in spite of myself. We must not give way to the feeling, and if you agree with me, we will amuse ourselves in spite of the storm."

I got up and lit all the candles in the candlesticks. The small room was suddenly lit as if by an illumination. At the same time a big fire—it was in the winter—gave out a stifling heat. "Now," I said, "what shall we do while we are waiting for supper time to come?"

It occurred to me that in Paris it was Carnival time. I seemed to see the carriages, full of people wearing masks, as they crossed the boulevards. I could hear the joyous crowd making a thousand curious remarks at the theatre doors; I could see the lewd dances, the many-coloured costumes, the wine and the folly; all my youth leapt in my heart.

"Let us disguise ourselves," I said to Brigitte. "There will only be us; what does it matter? If we have no costumes, we have the material to make them, and we will pass our time agreeably."

We took from a wardrobe dresses, shawls, mantles, scarves and artificial flowers; Brigitte, as usual, displayed a patient gaiety. We imitated each other; she wished to arrange my hair herself; we put on rouge and powder; the materials for that we found in an old casket, which belonged, I believe, to the aunt. At the end of an hour we could hardly recognize each other. We passed the evening in singing and thinking of a thousand silly tricks; towards one o'clock in the morning it was supper time.

We had rummaged in all the cupboards; one near me was left half open. On sitting down to table, I saw on a shelf the book I have already mentioned, in which Brigitte often wrote.

"Is not that the collection of your thoughts?" I asked, as I stretched out my arm to take it. "If it is not indiscreet, may I take a glance at it?"

I opened the book, although Brigitte made a gesture to prevent me doing so; on the first page I came across these words: "This is my testament!"

It was written in a firm hand; first of all I found a true account, without anger or bitterness, of all that Brigitte had suffered from me since she had been my mistress. She announced her firm determination to bear everything as long as I loved her, and to die when I left her. Her arrangements were made; she gave an account day by day of the sacrifice of her life, what she had lost, what she had hoped for, the frightful isolation she was in even when in my arms, the ever-growing barrier interposed between us, the cruelty with which I recompensed her love and devotion; they were recounted without a complaint; on the contrary, she went out of her way to justify me. At last she came to her personal affairs, and arranged for the disposal of her possessions. It was by poison, she said, she would end her life. She would die of her own free will, and expressly prohibited that her memory should ever serve as a pretext for any proceedings against me. "Pray for him!" those were her last words.

I found in the cupboard, on the same shelf, a little box I had already seen, full of a fine bluish powder, like salt.

"What is that?" I asked Brigitte, raising the

box to my lips. She uttered a terrible cry and rushed towards me.

"Brigitte," I said, "wish me good-bye. I will take away this box; you will forget me and live, if you wish to spare me murder. I will go this very night, and I do not ask your forgiveness, which you would give me where even God would not. Give me a last kiss."

I leant over her and kissed her forehead. "Not yet!" she cried in anguish. But I pushed her back on to the sofa and ran out of the room.

Three hours later I was ready to go, and the post-horses had arrived. The rain still fell, and I felt my way into the carriage. At the same instant the postilion started; I felt two arms clasp me round the body, and a sob clung to my mouth.

It was Brigitte. I tried my uttermost to get her to stay; I shouted out for the carriage to stop; I told her all I could think of to make her get out; I even went so far as to promise that I would one day come back to her, when time and travel had effaced the remembrance of the evil I had done her. I forced myself to prove to her that what had happened yesterday would do so again to-morrow; I repeated that I could only make her unhappy, and that to attach herself to me was to turn me into an assassin. I made use of prayer, oaths, and even threats; she only made one reply: "You are going away, take me; let us leave the country, and the past. We cannot live here, let us go elsewhere, where you like; let us go and die in a corner of the earth. We must be happy, I for you, and you for me."

I kissed her with such delight, that I thought I could feel my heart burst. "Go on!" I shouted to the postilion. We threw ourselves into one another's arms, and the horses went off at a gallop.

BOOK V

CHAPTER I

We made up our minds for a long journey and went to Paris; the necessary preparations and business took time, and we had to take furnished apartments for a month.

The resolution to leave France had changed everything; joy, hope and confidence all returned; there was no more sorrow and no more quarrels at the thought of the coming departure. There was nothing but dreams of happiness and vows of eternal love; at last I desired to make my dear mistress forget the wrongs she had suffered. How could I have resisted so many proofs of her tender affection and her courageous resignation? Not only did Brigitte forgive me, but she got ready to make the greatest sacrifice for me, and to leave everything to follow me. Unworthy as I felt of the devotion she displayed towards me, I desired that my love should recompense her; at last my good angel had triumphed, and love and admiration were uppermost in my heart.

Leaning at my side, Brigitte sought out upon the map the place where we were going to bury ourselves; we had not yet decided upon it, and we found in the uncertainty such a new and keen pleasure, that we pretended we were unable to decide upon anything. During our search our foreheads touched, and my arm was around Brigitte's waist. "Where shall we go? What shall we do? Where shall we begin our new

life?" How can I say what I experienced when in the midst of so many hopes I raised my head for a moment? How I repented at the sight of this beautiful, tranquil face smiling at the future, though still pale from the sorrows of the past! While I held her in this way, as her finger wandered over the map, while she talked in a low voice of the business she was transacting, of her desires, and of our future retreat, I would have given my blood for her. Projects for happiness, you are perhaps the only real happiness here below!

After we had spent about a week in business and shopping, a young man called upon us, bringing letters for Brigitte. After his conversation with her, I found her sad and depressed; but I only knew that the letters came from N—, the town where for the first time I had spoken of my love, and where dwelt Brigitte's only remaining relatives.

But our preparations were being rapidly completed, and there was only room in my heart for impatience for our departure; at the same time, the joy I felt hardly left me a moment's rest. When I got up in the morning, and the sun shone into the windows, I had such transports that I was almost intoxicated; I then entered the room where Brigitte was sleeping, upon tiptoe. She found me more than once, when she awoke, kneeling at the foot of her bed, watching her sleep, without being able to keep the tears from my eyes; I did not know how to convince her of the sincerity of my repentance. If my love for my first mistress had made me commit foolish acts, now I did so a hundred times more; everything strange or violent that excessive passion could inspire, I furiously sought. I had a cult for Brigitte, and although I had been her lover for

six months, it seemed to me that every time I approached her, I was looking at her for the first time; I hardly dared to kiss the hem of the dress of this woman whom I had ill-treated for so long. Her most trifling words made me start as if her voice was new to me; sometimes I threw myself sobbing into her arms, and sometimes I burst out laughing without a cause. I only spoke of my past conduct with horror and disgust, and I should have liked a temple consecrated to love to have existed somewhere, to have been baptized there, and to have put on there a distinct garment which could not have been taken from me.

I have seen Titian's "St. Thomas placing his finger upon Christ's wound," and I have often thought of him; if I dared compare love to a man's faith in his God, I should say I resembled him. What is the name of the sentiment which expresses this disturbed mind, still almost doubting, but also adoring? He touches the wound; the startled blasphemy halts upon his open lips, where the prayer gently rests. Is he an apostle? is he an unbeliever? is his repentance as great as his sin? Neither he, nor the painter, nor you who look at the picture, know anything of it; the Saviour smiles, and everything is absorbed like a drop of dew in a ray of the mighty goodness.

Thus before Brigitte I was mute and surprised without ceasing; I trembled lest she retained any fear, and lest the numerous changes she had seen in me rendered her distrustful. But in a fortnight she had read clearly my heart; she understood that through seeing her sincerity, I had become sincere in my turn, and as my love came from her courage, neither did she doubt.

Our room was full of clothes in disorder, albums, sketches, books, packets; and above all,

spread out, was the map we loved so much. We came and went; I stopped every few minutes to kneel before Brigitte, who treated me as lazy, saying, with a laugh, that she had to do everything, and that I was good for nothing; and while we were packing, plans were changed as quickly as thought. Sicily was a long way off; but the winter is very nice there! it is a very agreeable climate. Genoa is very beautiful, with its painted houses, its green walled gardens, and the Apennines behind it. But what a noise there is there, what crowds of people! Out of every three men you meet in the street one is a monk, and one a soldier. Florence is sad; it is the Middle Ages still living in the midst of us. How could we endure the barred windows and the frightful brown colour with which all the houses are tinged? What shall we do at Rome? We are not travelling to be dazzled, and still less to learn. Suppose we went to the banks of the Rhine? but the season will be over there, and although we are not following society, it is always depressing to go where fashionable people have been, after they have gone. But Spain? too many obstacles would stop us there: there one must needs march as if at war, and expect everything but rest. Let us go to Switzerland! though so many people travel there, we will leave fools to turn up their noses at it on that account; there, in all their splendour, are to be found the three colours most dear to God: the blue of the sky, the green of the meadows, and the whiteness of the snow at the top of the glaciers. "Let us go, let us go," said Brigitte; "let us fly there like two birds. Let us imagine, my dear Octave, that we have met for the first time. It was at a ball, I pleased you, and I love you; you tell me that a few miles from here, in some little town,

you have loved a Madam Pierson; what passed between you and her I simply will not believe. Will you not confide in me about your love for a woman whom you left for me? I can tell you quietly, in my turn, that it is not long ago that I loved a rascal, who made me very unhappy; you pity me, you make me keep silent, and it is agreed that there shall never be any question of it between us."

When Brigitte spoke like that, the feeling I experienced was something like one of avarice; and I clasped her with my trembling arms. "O God," I cried to myself, "I do not know whether I am trembling with joy or with fear. I am going to carry you off, my treasure. Before this immense horizon you are mine; we will depart. Let my youth die, and with it recollections, cares and regrets! O my good, brave mistress! you have made a man out of a child! If I lost you now I should never be able to love again. Perhaps, before knowing you, another woman might have cured me; but now you alone in the world can kill me or save me, for I carry in my heart the wound of all the evil I have done you. I have been ungrateful, blind and cruel. God be blessed that you love me still! If ever you return to the village where I saw you under the limes, look at the deserted house; there ought to be a phantom there, for the man who left it with you was not the same one who entered it."

"Is that really true?" said Brigitte, and her beautiful forehead, radiant with love, was uplifted towards the sky; "is it indeed true that I am yours? Yes, far from the odious world where you grew old before the time; yes, child, we will love. I will have you such as you are, and in whatever corner of the earth we are going to spend our lives, you will be able to forget, without

temorse, on the day you no longer love me. My mission will be accomplished, and I shall still have a God to thank for it."

What painful and horrible recollections these words brought to me! Finally, we decided to go first to Geneva, and choose a quiet place at the foot of the Alps, where we could pass the spring. Brigitte was already talking of the beautiful lake; I could already imagine in my heart the breeze which stirs it, and the fertile odour of the green valley; we were talking of Lausanne, Vevay, the Oberland, and beyond the peaks of Mount Rosa, the immense plain of Lombardy already; oblivion, repose, flight, all the spirits of a happy solitude, were urging and inviting us; when in the evening we clasped our hands and looked at one another in silence, we felt in ourselves that feeling of strange grandeur which takes possession of the heart on the eve of a long journey, that secret and inexplicable vertigo which comprises at the same time the terrors of the exile and the hopes of the pilgrimage. O God, it is Thy voice indeed which calls at that time, and which warns the man that he is coming to you. Is there not in human thought wings that quiver? What shall I say to you? is there not a whole world in those few words: "Everything is ready; we are going to start"?

Suddenly Brigitte grew languid. She drooped her head and became silent. When I asked her if she was in pain, she said "No" in a faint voice; when I spoke to her of the day of our departure, she got up, cool and resigned, and continued her preparations; when I swore to her that she would be happy, and that I wished to consecrate my life to her, she locked herself in to weep; when I kissed her, she became pale and turned away her eyes as she stretched out her

lips to me; when I told her that nothing had yet taken place, that it was not too late for her to give up the idea, she drew her brows into a grim frown; when I begged her to open her heart to me, when I repeated to her that, even if I were to die through it, I would sacrifice my happiness if it ever cost her a regret, she clasped me round the neck, and then stopped and repulsed me, as if she were doing it involuntarily. One day I went into her room, holding in my hand a ticket reserving our places in the coach from Besançon. When I approached her and put it upon her knees, she stretched out her hands, uttered a cry, and fell senseless at my feet.

CHAPTER II

ALL my efforts to understand the cause of this unexpected change had been fruitless, and so had my questions. Brigitte was ill, and obstinately remained silent. After a whole day spent sometimes begging her to explain, sometimes in exhausting myself in conjecture, I had gone out without caring where. As I was passing the Opera a commissionnaire offered me a ticket, and I went in mechanically, as I was in the habit of doing.

I could not pay attention to what was taking place, on the stage or in the auditorium; I was broken-hearted by sorrow, and at the same time so stupefied, that I only lived in myself, and external objects no longer seemed to attract my

attention. All my strength was concentrated upon a single thought, and the more I turned it over in my mind, the less clearly could I understand it. What frightful obstacle was this which had suddenly arisen, and on the eve of our departure was about to overthrow so many projects and hopes? If it was a question of an ordinary event, or even of a real misfortune, like an accident, or the loss of a friend, why did she maintain this obstinate silence? After all that Brigitte had done, at a time when our most cherished dreams seemed about to be realized, what kind of a secret could this be which was destroying our happiness, and which she declined to confide to me? What, she is hiding herself from me! If her sorrows, business, or even fear of the future, some motive of sorrow, uncertainty, or anger, keep her here some time, or make her give up altogether this long-expected journey, why does she not tell me? In the state in which my heart was, I could not suppose anything blamable. Even the appearance of a suspicion horrified me. How, on the other hand, could I believe in the inconstancy or caprice of this woman, knowing her as I did? I was lost in an abyss, and could not even see the faintest light, the least point to attract me.

Facing me in the gallery was a young man whose face was familiar to me. As often happens when one is preoccupied, I looked at him without noticing that I was doing so, and tried to think of his name. Suddenly I recognized him; he was the man who, as I mentioned before, had brought to Brigitte letters from N—. I got up quickly to go and speak to him, without thinking what I was doing. He was in a seat where I could not get to him without disturbing a large number of the audience, and I was obliged to wait till the interval.

My first idea had been that this young man was the one who, more than any other, could enlighten me upon the only thing that disturbed me. He had had several conversations with Madam Pier-
son a few days ago, and I remembered that after he had left her I always found her sad, not only on the first day, but also on every other occasion. He had seen her the day before, even on the morning of the day she was taken ill. Brigitte had not shown me the letters he had brought; it was possible that he knew the real reason which was delaying our departure. Perhaps he was not entirely in her confidence, but still he could not fail to know the contents of those letters, and I supposed that he knew sufficient of our business for me not to fear to question him. I was delighted to have found him, and as soon as the curtain was lowered I hastened to join him in the corridor. I do not know whether he saw me coming, but he went away and entered a box. I determined to wait till he came out, and remained walking up and down for a quarter of an hour, with my eyes fixed upon the door of the box. At last it opened, and he came out; I bowed to him as I went to meet him. He went a few paces in an irresolute manner, and then turning suddenly, descended the staircase and disappeared.

My intention to speak to him had been too evident for him to escape me thus without intending to avoid me. He must have known my face, and, besides, if he did not know it, he would have waited when he saw me coming towards him to see what I had to say. We were alone in the corridor when I went to meet him, and without doubt he did not want to speak to me. I did not look upon it as an impertinence; he was a man whom I had always greeted cordially when I saw him

there, and whose manners were simple and modest, how, then, could I imagine that he wished to insult me? He had desired to avoid me, to obviate an unpleasant interview. Why? This second mystery troubled me almost as much as the first. Although I tried hard to banish the idea, the disappearance of this young man, in my mind, was firmly connected with the obstinate silence of Brigitte.

Uncertainty is of all torments the most difficult to bear, and several times in my life I have exposed myself to great misfortunes, because I could not wait patiently. When I returned to the house I found Brigitte reading the fatal letters from N——. I told her that it was impossible for me to remain longer in the state of mind I was in, and that I wished to get rid of it at any cost; that I wished to know, whatever it might be, the reason of the sudden change which had taken place in her, and that if she refused to tell me, I should regard her silence as a positive refusal to go away with me, and even as a command to leave her for ever.

She showed to me, unwillingly, one of the letters she held in her hands. Her relations wrote to her that her departure would dishonour her for ever, that every one knew the reason of it, and that they considered themselves bound to let her know beforehand what the results would be; that she was living publicly as my mistress, and that, although she was free and a widow, she had yet to consider the name she bore; that neither they, nor any of her old friends, would ever see her again if she persisted; and last of all, by all sorts of threats and advice, they urged her to return to the country.

The tone of this letter annoyed me, and I at first looked upon it merely as an insult. "And

this young man who brings you these remonstrances," I cried, "without a doubt is charged with remonstrating with you himself, and he does not fail in his duty, does he?"

Brigitte's profound sadness made me reflect and soothed my anger. "You shall do as you like," she said to me, "and you will end by ruining me. My fate is in your hands, and you have long been the master of it. Wreak such vengeance as you please for the last effort my old friends are making to recall me to reason, to the world I formerly respected, and to the honour which I have lost. I have not a word to say, and if you like to dictate my answer, I will write it just as you wish me to."

"I only desire," I replied, "to know your intentions; it is for me, on the contrary, to confirm them, and I swear to you I am ready to do so. Tell me whether you mean to stay, or to go, or whether I must go alone."

"Why that question?" asked Brigitte; "have I told you that I have changed my mind? I am ill, and so I cannot go; but as soon as I am well, or even well enough to get up, we will go to Geneva as we arranged."

After this conversation we separated, and the deadly coldness with which she had pronounced the words saddened me more than a refusal would have done. It was not the first time that, by this kind of advice, attempts had been made to break our liaison; but up to that time, whatever impression those kind of letters had made upon Brigitte, it had soon been destroyed. How could I think that this reason alone had so much influence over her, when in less fortunate times it had none? I tried to discover whether in my conduct, since we had been in Paris, I had anything with which to reproach myself. "Can it be only," I said to

myself, "the weakness of a woman who desired to do an inconsiderate action, and who at the moment of its execution recoils before her own wish? Can it be what libertines might call a final scruple? But the gaiety which a week ago Brigitte displayed from morning to night, the agreeable plans abandoned and resumed without ceasing, the promises and protestations, were all frank and real, without any constraint. It was against my will she desired to go. No, there is some mystery; and how am I to find it out when, on my asking her, she gives me a reason which cannot be the true one? I cannot tell her she is lying, nor force her to give a different answer. She tells me she still wishes to go; but if she says it in that tone, ought I not to absolutely refuse? Can I accept such a sacrifice, when it is accomplished as a task, as a sentence? when I am exacting as the fulfilment of a promise that which I believed was offered out of love? O God! should I carry away in my arms this pale and languishing creature? Should I take her so far from home, for so long, perhaps for life, as a resigned victim? 'I will do,' she says, 'what you please'! No, indeed, it will not please me to accept anything offered by her patience; and, rather than see this suffering face another week, if she is silent, I will go alone."

Madman that I was, had I the strength to do it? I had been too happy for a fortnight to really dare to look back, and, far from experiencing this courage, I only thought of the means to carry off Brigitte. I spent the night without closing my eyes, and the first thing in the morning I decided at all risks to go and call upon the young man I had seen at the Opera. I do not know whether it was anger or curiosity which impelled me to do so, nor do I know what I wanted with him; but

I thought in this way he would at least be unable to avoid me, and that was all I desired.

As I did not know his address, I went into Brigitte's room to ask for it, making an excuse that it was a courtesy I owed him, in return for the numerous visits he had paid us; for I had not said a word about seeing him at the performance. Brigitte was in bed, and her tired eyes showed that she had been weeping. When I entered she stretched out her hand to me and said: "What is it?" Her voice was sad but tender. We exchanged a few friendly words, and I went out a little less downhearted.

The young man I was going to see was named Smith; he lived a little way away. As I knocked at the door, a feeling of uneasiness seized me; I went in slowly, as if blinded by an unexpected light. At his first gesture my blood froze. He was in bed, and in the same tone that Brigitte had just used, and with as pale and disturbed a face, he stretched out his hand to me and said the same words: "What is it?"

Think whatever you please, but there are those chances in life which man's reason cannot explain. I sat down without being able to answer him, and as if I had awakened from a dream I repeated to myself the question he had addressed to me. Why had I come to see him? How was I to tell him my errand? Supposing, even, that it would be useful to me to question him, how did I know that he would answer me? He had brought letters and knew those who had written them, but I knew that as well as he did, for had not Brigitte just shown them to me? It would be painful to me to question him, and I feared that he would suspect what was passing in my mind. The first words we exchanged were polite and insignificant. I thanked him for undertaking the commissions of

Madam Pierson's relatives; I told him that when we left France we would ask him to oblige us also; after that we kept silent, astonished at finding ourselves together.

I looked around me in an embarrassed way. The room this young man occupied was on the fourth floor; everything betokened honest and laborious poverty. A few books, musical instruments, white wood frames, papers in order on a table covered with a cloth, an old couch and a few chairs, were all it contained; but everything had an air of neatness and care, which gave it an agreeable appearance. His open and animated face at first impressed me favourably. I saw upon the mantelpiece a portrait of an aged woman; I approached it as if I were in a dream, and he told me it was his mother.

I remembered then that Brigitte had often spoken to me about him, and a thousand details I had forgotten came back to my mind. Brigitte had known him since his childhood. Before I came to the country she used sometimes to see him at N—; but since then she had only been there once, and then he was away. It was only by chance I had heard a few of his peculiarities which had struck me. His only means were derived from a moderate berth, and they served for the support of a mother and sister. His conduct towards those two women deserved the highest praise; he deprived himself of everything on their behalf, and although he possessed musical talents which would have made his fortune, a probity and extreme reserve had always made him prefer repose to the chances of success which presented themselves. In a word, he was one of those beings who live quietly, and are thankful that others do not perceive their worth.

I had been told certain of his characteristics,

which were sufficient to describe the man; he had been very much in love with a beautiful girl from the same neighbourhood, and after a year's courtship, he obtained consent to their marriage. She was just as poor as he was. The contract was about to be signed, and everything was ready for the wedding, when his mother said to him: "Who is going to marry your sister?" This sentence made him understand that if he got married he would have to spend his wages on his home, and, consequently, his sister would have no dowry. He courageously broke off his marriage and renounced his love; he then came to Paris and took the situation he still held.

I had never listened to the story, which was very much talked about in the country, without desiring to know the hero of it. This quiet and obscure devotion seemed to me more admirable than the most glorious deeds upon the field of battle. As I looked at his mother's portrait, I at once recollect ed this, and as I fixed my eyes upon him, I was surprised to see that he was so young. I could not help asking his age; it was the same as mine. Eight o'clock struck, and he got up.

At the first step he took I saw him totter; he shook his head.

"What is the matter?" I said to him.

He told me that it was time to go to the office, and that he was not strong enough to walk.

"Are you ill?" I asked.

"I have fever, and I am in terrible pain," he replied.

"You were much better last evening; I think I saw you at the Opera."

"Excuse my not recognizing you. I have the entrée at this theatre, and I hope to see you there again."

The more I looked at the young man, the room, and the house, the less I felt myself capable of entering upon the real object of my visit. The idea I had the previous evening that he could poison Brigitte's mind against me, disappeared; his air of frankness, and at the same time severity, stopped me and impressed me. Little by little my thoughts took a different course; I looked at him attentively, and he also seemed to be studying me curiously.

We were both twenty-one, and what a difference there was between us! He was used to an existence, in which the strokes of a clock determined his movements; he never saw life, except on the walk between his lonely little room and the Government Office; he even sent his mother his savings, that last human joy which clasps so avariciously every hand that works; he complained of a night of suffering, because it deprived him of a wearying day; and had only one thought, and that to watch over the welfare of another, from his childhood ever since he had arms! In that precious, rapid, inexorable time, what had I done? Was I a man? Which one of us had lived?

That which I have taken up a page to tell was the result of one look. Our eyes met and were fixed upon one another. He spoke of my journey and of the countries I was to visit.

"When do you start?" he asked me.

"I do not know; Madam Pierson is unwell, and has been in bed for three days."

"For three days!" he repeated, with an involuntary movement.

"Yes; what has surprised you?" I asked.

He got up, and threw himself upon me with extended arms and staring eyes. A terrible shudder made him tremble.

"Are you in pain?" I said to him, as I took his hand. But, at the same moment, he raised it to his face, and, not being able to stifle his tears, he dragged himself slowly back to his bed.

I looked at him in surprise; the violent transport of his fever had suddenly abated. I hesitated to leave him in this state and again approached him. He strongly repulsed me with a strange look of terror. When he was himself again:

"Excuse me," he said, in a weak voice; "I am not in a fit state to receive you. Be so good as to leave me; as soon as my strength will permit it, I will call and thank you for your visit."

CHAPTER III

BRIGITTE was better. As she had told me, she wished to start as soon as she was well enough. But I opposed the idea, and we had to wait another fortnight till she was strong enough to bear the journey.

Though sad and silent, she was kind. In spite of everything I could do to make her open her heart to me, she said that the letter which she had shown me was the only reason for her melancholy, and she begged me to say no more about it. So, reduced myself to a silence similar to hers, I vainly sought to read what was in her heart. Each other's company weighed upon us, and we went to the theatre every evening. There, sitting close together at the back of a box, we

sometimes clasped hands; from time to time a beautiful bit of music, or a word which struck us, made us exchange friendly glances; but both going and returning we remained silent, buried in our thoughts. Twenty times a day I felt ready to throw myself at her feet and ask her as a favour to give me the death-blow, or to give me back the happiness of which I had caught a glimpse; twenty times, just as I was about to do it, I saw her expression alter; she got up and left me, or by an icy word stopped upon my lips the words from my heart.

Smith came almost every day. Although his presence in the house had been the cause of all the trouble, and the visit I had paid him had left me in a very suspicious frame of mind, the way in which he spoke of our journey, his good faith and simplicity reassured me. I had spoken to him about the letters he had brought, and he had not appeared offended, but more sorrowful even than I was. He was ignorant of the contents, and his long-standing friendship for Brigitte caused him to blame the senders; he would not have brought them, he said, had he known their *contents*. From the reserved tone Madam Pierson took with him, I could not think he was in her confidence. I therefore met him with pleasure, although there was always a certain amount of restraint and ceremony between us. He was asked to be, after our departure, the intermediary between Brigitte and her friends, to prevent an open rupture; the esteem in which he was held in the country would be of some use in these negotiations, and I could not help being pleased with the idea. He had a noble character. When we were all three together, if he noticed any coldness or restraint, I could see that he made every effort to restore our gaiety; if he seemed uneasy

at what was going on, it was always without indiscretion, and in such a way as to make us understand that he desired to see us happy; if he spoke of our liaison, it was with respect, and as a man to whom love is a sacred tie before God; he was a kind of friend, and he inspired me with complete confidence.

But, in spite of everything, even his efforts, he was sorrowful, and I could not banish the strange thought which seized me. The tears I had seen him shed, his illness coming exactly at the same time as that of my mistress, made me think that I had discovered a melancholy sympathy between them, and disturbed and troubled me. Not a month ago I should have had transports of jealousy if I had the slightest ground for suspicion; but now, how could I suspect Brigitte? What was the secret she was hiding from me? was she going to start with me? Even if Smith was aware of some mystery of which I was ignorant, what sort of a mystery could it be? What guilt could there be in their sorrow and their friendship? She had known him as a child; she saw him again, after many years, as she was leaving France; she found herself in difficulties, and chance decreed that he should hear of it, and even made him a kind of instrument in her evil destiny. Was it not quite natural that they should exchange sorrowful glances, that the sight of this young man should recall to Brigitte the past, some remembrances and regrets? Could he, in his turn, see her go away without fear, without thinking of the risks of the long journey, and the risks of a wandering life, almost banished and abandoned as she was? Without doubt it was so, and I felt, when I thought of it, that it was for me to rise, to put myself between them, to reassure them; to make them believe in me, to tell

one that my arm would sustain her as long as she was willing to lean upon it, and the other that I was grateful to him for the affection he displayed towards us, and the services he was going to render us. I felt it, but I could not do it. A mortal chill gripped my heart, and I remained upon my couch.

After Smith had gone in the evening we either remained silent or talked of him. Some strange attraction made me ask Brigitte every day for fresh details of his career. She only told me, however, what I have told the reader; his life had never been anything else but poor, obscure and honourable. To tell the whole of it only a few words were needed; but I made her repeat them without ceasing, without knowing why I was so interested. On reflection, there was at the bottom of my heart a secret sorrow I did not admit to myself. If this young man had come at the time of our joy, brought an unimportant letter to Brigitte, and shook her hand as he got into his carriage, should I have paid the least attention to it? What did it matter whether he had recognized me at the Opera or not, or that he had shed tears in my presence without my knowing the reason of them as long as I was happy? But, while not able to understand the reason of Brigitte's sadness, I could clearly see that my past conduct, though she did not say so, was connected with her grief. If I had been as I should have been during the six months we lived together, nothing in the world, I knew, could have disturbed our love. Smith was only an ordinary man, but he was good and devoted, his modest and simple qualities were like the great clear lines the eye could seize at once without difficulty; in a quarter of an hour a person knew him, and he inspired confidence, if not admiration.

I could not help telling myself that if he had been Brigitte's lover, she would have joyfully gone away with him.

It was my own wish which had delayed our departure, and I already repented of it. Brigitte also sometimes pressed me: "What is delaying us?" she said; "I am recovered, and everything is ready." What was stopping me? I did not know.

Sitting near the fireplace, I fixed my eyes alternately upon Smith and upon my mistress. I saw that they were both pale, serious and mute. I was ignorant of the reason for this, and, in spite of myself, I said that it must be the same reason, and that there was not two secrets to discover. But it was not one of the vague, unhealthy suspicions which had formerly tormented me; it was an invincible and fatal instinct. It pleased me to leave them alone by the side of the fire, while I went to dream on the quay, leaning upon the parapet and looking at the water like a loafer.

When they talked of their stay at N_____, and when Brigitte, almost playfully, adopted a motherly tone in recalling the days they had spent together, I seemed to suffer, and yet I took pleasure in it. I asked them questions, and spoke to Smith about his mother, his occupation and his prospects. I gave him the opportunity to display himself in a favourable light, and I forced his modesty to reveal his merits. "You love your sister very dearly, do you not?" I asked him. "When do you expect her to get married?" He then told us, with a blush, that the household expenses were very heavy, that perhaps it would come about in two years, perhaps sooner, if his health would permit of extraordinary labours which would produce remuneration; that there was in the country a wealthy family, the eldest

son of which was his friend; that they were very fond of one another, and happiness would come one day, like repose, without thinking of it; that he had given up in favour of his sister the little property his father had left; that his mother opposed the idea, but he was determined to carry it out in spite of her; that a young man ought to live by his hands, but a girl's existence was decided on her wedding-day. In this way he unfolded to us his life and soul, and I watched Brigitte listen to him. Then when he got up to go, I accompanied him to the door, and remained there motionless and pensive till the sound of his footsteps died away on the stairs.

I then returned to the room, where I found Brigitte preparing to undress. I greedily contemplated her charming body, those treasures of beauty I had so many times possessed. I watched her comb her long hair, and turn when her dress fell on the floor, like a Diana entering the bath. She went to bed, and I hastened to mine; it never entered my mind that Brigitte deceived me, nor that Smith was enamoured of her; I never thought of watching them, or trying to surprise them. I did not realize anything. I said to myself: "She is very beautiful, and poor Smith is an honourable fellow; they both have a great sorrow, and so have I." It broke my heart, but, at the same time, it relieved me.

We found on opening our trunks that a few things were still lacking; Smith was commissioned to procure them. He was very active, and said he was obliged by having commissions entrusted to him. When I returned home one day I saw him stooping down, fastening a portmanteau. Brigitte was before a piano, which we had hired by the week while we were in Paris. She was playing one of those old tunes, into which she

put so much expression, and of which I had been so fond. I stopped in the ante-room near the door, which was open; each note entered into my soul; never before had she sung so sadly and so holily.

Smith listened to her in raptures; he was on his knees holding the buckle of the portmanteau. He rubbed it, and then let it fall, and looked at the clothes which he had just folded and covered with a piece of white cloth. The song finished, and he remained in the same position; Brigitte, with her hands upon the keyboard, gazed at the distant horizon. I saw for the second time tears falling from the young man's eyes; I was on the point of bursting into tears myself, and, not knowing what my feelings were, I entered and extended my hand to him.

"Were you there?" asked Brigitte. She trembled and appeared surprised.

"Yes, I was there," I answered. "Sing, my dear, I beg of you. Let me hear your voice again!"

She began to sing, without making me any answer; it was for her a recollection. She saw my emotion, and also Smith's; her voice changed. The last sounds, which were almost inarticulate, seemed to be lost in the sky; she got up and gave me a kiss. Smith still held my hand; I felt him press it strongly and convulsively; he was as pale as death.

Another day I had brought a lithographic album containing several views of Switzerland. We three looked at them, and from time to time, when Brigitte saw a view which pleased her, she stopped to look at it. There was one which seemed much better than the others; it was a landscape in the canton of Vaud, some way from the road from Briques; it was a green valley planted with apple

trees, in the shade of which animals were grazing; in the distance was a village, consisting of a dozen wooden houses sprinkled here and there among the meadows, and rising on the slopes of the surrounding hills. Upon the first view a young girl, wearing a large straw hat, was sitting at the foot of a tree, and a farm boy, standing in front of her, seemed to be pointing out to her with his iron-tipped stick the road he had traversed; he was indicating a twisting path, which lost itself in the mountains. Above them was the Alps, and the picture was crowned by three peaks covered with snow, tinted by the rays of the setting sun. Nothing could be more simple nor more beautiful than this landscape. The valley resembled a lake of verdure, and the eye followed its contours with the most perfect tranquillity.

"Shall we go there?" I said to Brigitte. I took a pencil and traced some lines upon the picture.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"I am trying," I told her, "to see whether, with a little skill, I can make this figure resemble you. This young girl's pretty hat would suit you well, I think; and if I succeeded, I might make this fine mountaineer look something like me."

This fancy appeared to please her; and setting to work with an eraser, she soon rubbed out the boy's and girl's faces in the picture. I was drawing her picture, and she wished to draw mine. The faces were very small, so it was not a very difficult matter; we agreed that the portraits were good ones, and it was possible to recognize our features in them. After we had finished laughing, the book remained open, and, as the servant called me on business, I went out a few minutes later.

When I came back, Smith was leaning on the table, and looking so attentively at the picture that